1863

PROLOGUE.

Cool green shade covered the river at the bend, and between the leaves the mellow sunshine of September dappled the water and marked the sandy shallows. Two boys played in the stream, naked and happy; the younger, with the formidable gravity of his years, intent upon moving an old punt against the current. The elder boy was dark and thin and brown, and very nearly a man, for he was at least seventeen years old. He lay on his back in the bottom of the boat, with all the gracious dignity of a senior schoolboy, and permitted his young friend to do furious paddling with half a broken oar. The younger lad, a fair-haired cherub of twelve years old or thereabouts, appeared quite willing to blister his young hands without assistance.

"Come on, my boy, come on!" remarked the dark youth, encouragingly, but without moving. "A little more ginger, Frank. We've gone nearly six feet."

"I can't get her round," gasped the boy. "And it's leaking frightfully. Why is the water colder when it comes through the bottom than it is in the river, David?"

"It isn't; it only feels like it," replied David, seriously.

At that moment the voyage was concluded, for the old punt sank without warning in at least five feet of water, spilling its freight amid stern cries from David and shrill yells from the delighted Frank. They struck

out gallantly, and reached the shore with much spluttering.

"It always does that," remarked Frank, bitterly regarding the punt in the distance. It was floating downstream, capsized and waterlogged.

"It was your fault, Frank," said David, rubbing himself down with Frank's shirt. He rolled over on the grass and shut his eyes. "It was your fat little belly that sank us." He threw a twig at his young friend.

"It wasn't," Frank denied, with warmth. "It was you lying about all over the punt." He returned the twig, and David grunted. "Anyway," continued the boy, with dignity, "I'm going up the hill by myself to get warm in the sun. You can stay down here if you like."

"Thanks," said David. "Do like." He snored sonorously, and Frank departed to a point about ten feet away up the slope, where he sprawled in the sunshine and shut his eyes too. He never went far from David's elbow when the latter spent his holidays at Codnor.

He adored David with complete and unreasoning hero-worship; he was a shy and awkward lad, but he was never shy and awkward with David. And, for his part, David was always kind to the boy. He invented diversions which Frank loved, of course, and carried them through with a sort of detached thoroughness that was natural to him. And he never snubbed Frank. He was invariably dryly sympathetic when Frank was earnest. The boy was at ease with him and loved him. But David had a youthful passion for experiment.

Everything was very peaceful in the afternoon sun; the whole world was calm and peaceful and placid. Long

grass rustled in Frank's ears, and the birds were lazily cheerful about the clump of trees which overhung the river below him. The air was filled with the humming of summer insects, and over the hill behind him he heard the shouting of some remote ploughman. This held the boy for a moment, for all these acres belonged to his father. Then he turned on his side, and made a grotesque and enchanting world for himself among the grass stems. The sun shone upon that orderly and comfortable land of Sussex; the bell of some distant little flint church blended in the breeze with the faint cries of the labourer; and Frank drowsed like David below him.

After a time David opened his eyes, blinked at the blue sky between the leaves, and considered the drifting punt, which was floating placidly on its way towards the sea. He stirred himself with an effort.

"Frankie!" he shouted, and relapsed, certain of obedience if the boy were within earshot.

The child awoke, smiled like a baby at the sky, and rolled himself downhill, bringing up with a bump against the recumbent youth at the foot of the slope.

"Get off my stomach, you young ass!" said David, without emotion.

"Is that your stomach, David?" asked Frank, innocently. "It's so soft I thought it was your head." Immediately he went into hysterics at his own superlative and biting wit.

"Good Lord, but I am funny!" he remarked, in a satisfied tone.

David groaned in anguish. "I'll have to discipline you, my friend," he announced, but he made no move towards that end, and Frank knew perfectly well that he wouldn't.

"Get up, Frank," said David. "We must rescue

that old punt." He rolled the boy off his chest and sat up, yawning.

"It'll be in Hawley's wire," assured the lad. "It always sticks there." He started along the bank, but was recalled by David's gentle warning.

They dressed themselves, shirts and flannel trousers and tennis shoes, and moved off downstream.

"Oo-er," gasped Frank, wriggling in his wet shirt. "Hawley's got some apples ripe," he announced, as an item of general interest, referring to the owner of the neighbouring farm. "I went and took some and there was just an old row. The old swine!"

"Why?" asked David, lazily interested.

"Oh, I don't know!" Frank cut at the nettles on the bank with a stick. "They were some special kind or some rot like that. He went round to the house and father was furious and I was hauled up. Oh, there was a frightful row!"

"What did they do to you?"

"Oh, I had to promise and swear that I'd never go near the place again; and I had my pocket-money stopped, and everybody was frightfully fed up. You know how they do it, David."

"Do you good, you greedy little beast!" said David, unkindly. A little devil came into his head and whispered, and he chuckled.

"There's the punt!" shouted Frank, and broke into a run. Sure enough, it was caught in the wire which crossed the river between the farms and prevented cattle straying. David stopped the boy as he began operations with a hooked stick.

"Frank, come here!" he ordered, calmly.

The boy looked round. "You could reach it if you tried, David," he complained, and continued his work.

"Where do those apples live?" asked David.

"Over there behind the farm." Frank gestured vaguely, absorbed in his salvage operations.

"Go and bring me some of those apples, Frank," said David.

"Oh, yes!" shouted the boy, in high scorn. "Not again, thank you." He laughed loudly.

"Come here, will you?" said David, quietly.

"But, David——" expostulated the lad. Then he dropped the stick and turned to meet the elder boy's smiling eyes.

"Go and get some of those apples, Frank," repeated David, gently.

"I can't, David, honestly," said Frank, suddenly near to tears.

"Go on, Frank, bring them here," said David, holding the child's gaze. The impish devil within him drove him to try his power.

"But I promised——"

"Don't say anything more, Frank, but just go." David pointed towards the orchard. Frank was very white and looked dazed. He had to go; there was no help for it. David's black eyes bored into his brain.

"Frank!" The inexorable voice again. Frank turned and ran stumblingly towards the forbidden fruit.

David paused for a moment on the bank, and sat down, trembling a little with the effort. Then he lay back and laughed, but he was really rather amazed. He knew, and Frank knew, that he would never use force to back his will. And, unlike most boys of his age, there was no trace of physical cowardice in Frank. David had never dreamed of making the boy afraid of him—Frank was not afraid of him. David was interested, very interested, in his experiment, and pondered over it with a schoolboy's budding intellect.

But Frank did not return. Half an hour passed, three-quarters, and still there was no sign of him. David wondered if his trial had been as successful as he thought. He freed the punt, towed it back to the bend of the river, and made it secure. Then he sauntered back to the house to discover developments. Obviously something had occurred, he observed, as he reached the wicket gate between the meadows and the garden. A dog-cart stood in the drive, and as David crossed the lawn he perceived signs of excitement, people thronging, in the dining-room.

No one paid any attention to him, or even saw him, as he leant against the sill of the open window and gazed contemplatively within. It was an occasion of high justice. It was a terrible occasion. The son of the house had been caught red-handed in petty theft.

Frank's father, old Francis Champion, sat at the head of the table. Beside him the sinner's mother perched on a low chair, half crying at her boy's disgrace, half laughing at her pompous mankind. A prosperous looking farmer—Hawley, by Gad! thought David—stood by, and about these ponderous judges crowded a nurse and a housekeeper and various retainers. And they all stared solemnly at the foot of the table, where little Frank stood up, alone in crime, and awaited judgment with a stolid face.

"But, darling boy," said his mother, "after you'd been punished only last week! Did you go by yourself to Mr. Hawley's orchard?"

"Yes, mother," answered Frank, with a gulp. He had caught David's eye behind his judges. David, with laughter in his heart, tried to direct his answers.

"But why did you go there, dear?" implored his mother.

"I was getting them for David," replied Frank. He felt better now that David was there.

"Did David tell you to go?" asked his father, shrewdly.

"I was getting them because I thought he wanted them," replied Frank obstinately.

"But——"

Now David smiled serenely at Frank and created a diversion by entering the room by way of the window. He joined the culprit in the dock.

"It's all my fault, sir," he said, looking at old Champion. "I was down at the river; I didn't know all this was going on, or I'd have been here at once. I made Frank go."

They were all very fond of David in that house, and while they murmured he advanced on Mr. Hawley.

"Mr. Hawley, I believe," he said, and smiled very charmingly. "I'm awfully sorry, sir, to have given you all this trouble."

"This is Mr. David Holt, Mr. Hawley," put in old Champion. Accustomed to classing the two boys together, suddenly he was forced to regard this aloof young schoolboy as a potential man.

"How do, Mr. Holt?" said Hawley, and they shook hands.

"Frank thought I knew all about it or he wouldn't have gone," announced David, gathering both Champion and the farmer into his frank gaze. "He wouldn't have disobeyed you, you know, sir, only I made him. I can't tell you how sorry I am. I should have come round to your place to-night, Mr. Hawley, and explained."

"Oh, that's all right, sir," said Hawley. He had not anticipated this friendly spirit and he wanted to get away. "I told Mr. Champion here that I'd bring the

boy round if I caught him," he explained—speaking to David, who appeared to him to be running the whole affair. "And I'm a man of my word."

"So I've heard, Mr. Hawley," said David, handsomely. "And I'm very sorry indeed to have been the cause of all this trouble."

"Well, then, that's all right," stated the farmer, awkwardly anxious to depart. "If you ask me first you shall have all the apples you can carry away. Only I like to be asked about my own fruit. Any man does," he added, suddenly truculent, feeling his grievance again.

"Very naturally too, and thanks very much," said David, and he shook hands and looked into the man's face with such a pleasantly apologetic expression that Hawley was quite melted.

"You come round to-morrow, and you shall have all you want," he assured David. He included the bored Frank in a comprehensive gesture, and hurried out, with old Champion behind him. "Now about those hedges, Hawley——"

The legal machinery fell to pieces and Frank, wriggling from his mother's clasp, escaped into the garden. David sat down penitently on the floor in front of Mrs. Champion.

"I'm so awfully sorry, Mrs. Champion——" he began.

"Oh, you boys!" she said. "Get on with you!" and ran away laughing. David strolled leisurely out into the garden, and Frank joined him instantly from behind some convenient shrubs. The lad fell into step beside his friend and they walked down the path.

"Lucky you came, David," he remarked. "They were just fed up. You got me out of it."

"I got you into it, my fat lad," David replied, looking quizzically down at the boy. He wondered if Frank

COLD BLOOD

CHAPTER I.

"I REPEAT, I am bored!" remarked the Baron, cheerfully.

David raised his eyebrows and thoughtfully regarded the smoke from his cigarette. The statement pained him; he had been doing his best to amuse his uncle for the whole of dinner.

"How, uncle?" he asked. "D'you mean now, this moment; or is it your mighty undertakings which bore you?"

"It is that the takings are not mighty enough!" answered his uncle, wittily. David chuckled dutifully and perfunctorily; he had expectations from his uncle. "But you are one who understands, my David; that is good. No, it is——"

The Baron pushed aside the after-dinner litter and placed his fat elbows upon the table. He wore the single large diamond ring common to men of his class, and the reflection of the table lamp made his nephew blink.

"Jove, what a stone!" he cried.

Giusti looked pleased and gazed meditatively at his ring. He forgot his complaint and brightened perceptibly.

"You like them, yes?" he asked. "I tell you, David, I can show you better than that. We will have

had used his brain, and exactly what his influence had been. He decided to try it again.

"I'm sorry, Frank," he said, and touched the boy's shoulder lightly.

"No!" said the boy. "I don't know why I ever went. I was a fool!" He shook his head, bewildered. "There's tea on the lawn," said Frank, and hurried forward.

your Aunt Rosalie put on all her pretty things and then display herself. It will be old fashioned, like Scripture." He rang the bell eagerly.

David grinned at his uncle's notions of Scripture, but he was interested and pleased. For many years the Baron had made arch allusions to his store of stones, and now he was to see it; the occasion was notable. Queer card, his uncle, David thought, and regarded the elderly and stout financier with an assessing eye. Baron Giusti was David's maternal relative, with Jewish and Italian blood in his veins, and he had been brought up, for his sins, in Austria and Germany, where he had acquired, respectively, his title and his accent. And he had the kindest heart in the world, which his nephew thoroughly appreciated. His most important characteristic, however, to David's mind, was his collection of jewels. For twenty years the Baron had collected precious stones. They were his passion, he adored them; yet he was neither connoisseur nor specialist. Any valuable stone attracted him, whatever its setting. Through all the capitals of Europe he carried his jewel cases, constantly adding to his store.

It was not merely a limited artistic passion which drove him to include them always in his luggage. He found them mightily useful at times, when some mysterious enterprise involved him deeper than he had anticipated, as collateral or security. He had raised a hundred thousand pounds within twenty-four hours on the contents of the large case. There was a great deal of method in his madness.

The Baron addressed the servant.

"You will ask Constance to come," he said. All his life the Baron had hated that name, but he concealed fairly well his desire to alter phonetically the last two letters into a "t" and an "z." He turned to David

and continued, " I am anxious that you should see them, all these pretty toys that I have gathered. Some day, perhaps——" he broke off, smiling fatuously, and wagged his fat finger at his nephew. David smiled sweetly in return, and from sheer habit expressed in an inarticulate murmur his general unworthiness, his desire to please, and his gratitude—exactly for what he knew not. He liked his uncle well enough, but he distrusted him profoundly when he played so continually upon future benefits.

The maid entered and stood by the door, her prim lips pursed in disapproval of the liqueurs on the table. David watched her while her master talked.

But for her comparative youth, and an attractive neatness of figure, Constance made an excellent type of the faithful and elderly English maid. She had served the Baroness for sixteen years, and the young man had always wondered at her faithful service. He could not understand how his uncle and aunt were able to inspire such fidelity in Constance, who, he thought, would always despise her employers as unclassed. She was treated by both as a confidential and trusted subordinate, and was a definite authority on the proprieties.

But the Baron was talking. " You will persuade her, Constance ? " he asked. " Take your key of the large case. Get it from the safe and open it before madame, and then request that she will do us the honour of appearing in her glory."

The disapproval of Constance was obvious.

" Very well, sir," she replied, and left the room, her lips pressed even tighter.

" Never did I see such a disapproving back as that of Constance," cried the Baron, and poured out Chartreuse for his nephew and himself.

"She looks after my aunt well, though," said David. "Tell me, sir, do you leave the keys of the jewel case in her hands? Aren't you afraid that something might happen?"

His uncle looked surprised.

"Why not?" he asked, expecting no reply. "Constance is good—she is always to be trusted. She has travelled alone to Vienna and brought back safely jewels that I would trust with no man—not even you, David, my friend. She loves your Aunt Rosa, and she loves me too—I know it."

David was perfectly sure that he didn't know it, but made no comment. A dull pair, he thought, his uncle and aunt, but he was very glad of their dinners and liked the pleasantly expensive methods of his uncle.

"And how is it, your work, then, David?" asked Giusti, his interest somewhat obviously forced. "You like it—you will get on, yes? It is long hours and no outside interests that will help you to succeed. It is hard, but it is good, to succeed." He looked doubtfully at his nephew, and continued. "The men at the top, they take an interest in you? That is the thing, to make the interest. How we tried everything when I was young. It was Hamburg——"

David nodded again. "Might as well let the old ass talk," he thought; anything better than that he should have to talk himself. He wanted to see those jewels.

The Baron gulped his liqueur, and went on, much more interested now in his own experiences.

"I was a messenger once," he said. "I have a message to deliver to the president, and when I come into the office I sprain my ankle on the steps. There was a directors' meeting in an hour, and I sit and wait.

Ah! then the meeting is on, and the big men all arrive. I stumble into the room, hand the president the telegram, say, 'It is important, nicht?' and faint in his arms. They think I have walked all that way with a broken leg because it is important. It was so I did rise!" He chuckled complacently, and glanced at David for his effect.

David wondered if the dreary manager of his office would be impressed if he fainted in his arms, and decided that he would hate it.

Constance knocked and entered, with a slight air of repressed excitement. "Madame will see the gentlemen in her sitting-room."

The Baron pushed back his chair at once. "Bring your cigarette," he cried from the door, and they walked along the hotel corridor.

David was rather excited. He had never seen the Baron's jewels, or only specimens that his uncle loved to purchase and produce at odd moments from a waistcoat pocket, and he had heard about them all his life. The maid opened a door and ushered them in with some ceremony. David burnt his fingers with his cigarette; he was amazed.

The room was dark and long and richly furnished; deep padded arm-chairs, a carpet like a quicksand, suggested gloomy opulence. There was a fire-place at the far end where a fire glowed ruddily and strong behind the bars, with extinction and decay in the near future, but no grey ash yet to mar its heat. At each end of the mantelpiece stood an electric reading lamp, the only illumination in the room, cunningly shaded to throw strong shafts like limelight upon the hearthrug. The setting was distinctly of the stage, but impressive nevertheless.

On the hearthrug, where the beams met in a pool of

light, stood the Baroness, a fine woman with an eye for effect. She stood easily before the fire, her low-cut evening dress covered wonderfully with jewels. The lamplight caught the diamonds in her hair and ears, and the collar of sapphires about her throat. Her hands were clasped before her, the emeralds on her fingers holding points of light. On her breast a Normandy cross of diamonds and sapphires was framed in the rope of pearls which hung from her neck, and at her waist a belt covered with rubies and other glories answered the red glow from the fire. Curious jewels on her arms and shoulders enveloped her body in light. At her feet lay the jewel case, the lid thrown carelessly back, and the light shone cunningly on many-coloured stones. A diamond flashed from the rug as if she had disdainfully thrown it down—the effect was gorgeous and beyond conventional standards. She threw her head back and laughed at the men.

David was rather pale and his hands shook. The Baron's puffy face was suffused with blood and he breathed heavily.

"My little Rosie!" he muttered, and moved down the room towards her. But Constance was too quick for him.

"Outside, sir!" she said, and urged the astonished men to the door. She had an instinct for the dramatic, and she felt that Rosalie's laugh, repeated as the men went out, was quite the correct finishing touch. Aunt Rosalie played her part with distinction.

They returned to the Baron's room without speaking. Whisky and soda seemed the obvious thing after an affair like that. David was surprised at the violence of his feelings, but the Baron approved of his own emotions, and was thinking things about his wife that he had not thought for years.

The woman, of course, was nothing to David. She was just his kind old aunt; she might have been a tailor's manikin or a clothes-horse. But the jewels lived in his eyes and clouded his consciousness for days. He wanted them.

CHAPTER II.

I HAVE seen a Canadian soldier asleep on a pile of bricks in the middle of the Strand, in its noisiest section, but really it is no place to sleep, nor even to work. David sat at his desk in the window and scowled at the hurrying throngs outside. He was becoming round-shouldered ; not from ceaseless application to his duties, but because some careless decorator had placed the gold letters INSURANCE on his window at an inconvenient height. This caused him to stoop slightly in order to observe the passing show.

It was impossible to work in such a din. Even the interesting cost to the firm of an influenza epidemic failed to grip his mind. For a moment he considered his office, and then he decided to leave his companions to this nauseating business of work. What was he, David Holt, doing in such a galley ? What in Heaven's name had he to do with snug city berths and crowded trains of a morning ? He took his hat and stick and gloves and strolled nonchalantly between the tables down the long room ; the girls were carefully indifferent to him, but the other men looked up and eyed him resentfully. He assumed rights and privileges which would have caused their dismissal. He was cleverer than they, and he knew it.

As David passed through the hallway the manager opened the door of his room.

"Going out, Holt ?" he said, casually.

"Obviously," said David, and continued his way downstairs. The manager looked after him thoughtfully, and stopped him at the foot.

"Holt!" he called, pleasantly. David paused on the bottom step. "Are you going out on business Mr, Holt?" asked the manager, politely.

"Oh, Lord, no!" David replied. "I'm going out for a stroll."

"I doubt if it will be necessary for you to return, Mr. Holt," said the manager, as if he had been seized suddenly with a bright idea. David himself was struck with the extreme brilliance of the suggestion.

"Precisely my opinion," he announced, with enthusiasm. "One of your stout fellows will clear up the muddles, I expect." He smiled confidentially up the stairs. "Good-bye!" he cried, waved his stick airily, and stepped out into the noisy street. That was the end of David's commercial experience. "How much easier it is to get out than it is to get in," thought David with surprise, "when it's all so unpleasant." He grinned to himself at his uncle's eagerness for him to climb the commercial ladder.

The young man sauntered gently towards Regent Street. He was always supremely interested in himself and his own affairs, and the only thing that could make him forget himself even for a moment was a jeweller's shop window. David intended to live comfortably, to possess and use all the little amenities of civilization from which he was debarred at present by his lack of means, but he was undecided how to achieve his end: He hesitated before a shop window which drew him like Destiny. David liked immensely the look and feel of a gold coin; it was such a neat compact little parcel of pleasant things. So he was thrilled all the more by a precious stone, for it meant the same thing on a greater scale, and was even smaller than the coin. Between magnificent silk curtains a clerk appeared, lifting a jewel case from the display. How easy, now,

to slip one of those into your coat pocket. David wondered that these things weren't done more frequently, and continued his way, shaking his head over the fallibility of human nature.

This young man is important and must be described. He was tall and lean and distinguished, by which I mean that strangers saw his face for the first time in a casual crowd and recognized him again when they passed him in the street. This bored David distinctly. He liked to finish things off sharply, to live his life in chapters, to be done with a thing when it had lost its particular charm ; nothing bored him more than to be reminded of a finished and forgotten chapter by some casual participator cropping up again from God knows where and remembering his face.

He had a large and quick mouth, the lower lip protruding a fraction, a large nose not quite straight, a small, neat chin with a chiselled cleft precisely in the centre, an excellent forehead. His eyes were set wide apart, of varying degrees of darkness ; his hair was black as your hat, his skin brown, and he had a long, level, undisturbed way of looking full at you which seemed both frank and friendly. Altogether the man looked rather out of the ordinary and pleasantly vivid and carefree—except upon the rare occasions when he wished to be unpleasant, and then his eyes went yellow, and he suddenly had the beastly expression of a snarling cat. Quite an extraordinary face then ; but this occurred very seldom indeed. He was a very likeable fellow, and his own peculiar qualities were hidden beneath appearance and manner of the most attractive. One had to know David some years before these qualities became clear.

He had lately returned from abroad, where he had subjected his slender income, derived from his dead

mother, to a strain it was quite unable to withstand. So his usual bank balance had become conspicuous by its absence, and David had been labouring in a gallant but personally distasteful attempt to make both ends meet. "Teach them early the value of work!" quoth his uncle, with a pudgy hand tapping the dinner table, and a slightly German accent; and accordingly he had found his nephew a junior position with a firm in which he was interested. David's opinions on the matter of work were never worth recording, however, and this moment he had severed his connexion with the establishment after a month of unaccustomed toil. His clothes were middle-aged and well cut and plain, and he looked decent and strolled up Regent Street.

Miss Sophie Carmichael, pretty and round and blonde, was staring into the window of a jeweller's shop. Miss Carmichael was frequently to be seen in this vicinity, but her bearing, both sedate and demure, gave the lie to her feminine acquaintances. Her livelihood she acquired as carelessly as she had acquired her name, but it is better not to inquire into such things. Something might have been known if two or three young men, whose allowances were as respectable as their connexions, had pooled their experiences. Nevertheless, Sophie was no promiscuous Rahab, and she loved David, who asked her nothing and gave her much. David was always his own best company, and women were not for him, but sometimes he wanted to talk, and there must be some one to listen when one talks, so Sophie suffered many pleasant dinners. Also she was a truly wonderful dancer, and David liked dancing; he was taking her to a fancy dress ball that very night. She saw the man and beckoned him to her side.

"My wrist watch is broken, Davy," she announced, simply. "I'm so glad I met you. Look at these

pretties," and she pointed to the somewhat expensive baubles ranged before her. All kinds of wrist watches were there—square, round, octagonal and triangular, ornamented and plain, covered and naked, but mostly appearing to be the result of a deep conspiracy on the part of the makers to conceal the time.

"Merely a collection of paradoxes," remarked David, airily, conscious of the sparse shillings in his pocket, and appreciating the necessity of keeping the conversation as vague as possible.

"Er——" said Sophie. The whole thing was as direct as you please.

"Dear, dear—what a child—what a child!" cried David, testily. The effect of this pleased him, and he repeated the words to himself.

"Just imagine, Sophie," he continued, in a confidential tone, "when we're old enough to talk like that to our children." They both looked awed. He touched her elbow and tried to remove her from temptation.

But Sophie rallied. "This has nothing to do with what I said," she cried.

"I know, I know," agreed David, with sympathy. "But, dear lady, the luck changes, and you know a wrist watch, a potty little wrist watch, is nothing when that happens. Let's go and have tea."

He tightened his grip on her round elbow and they moved off towards Bond Street, though the lady cast a backward and pensive glance at the shop window.

"I won't forget!" assured David, and laughed down at her. They went to tea, and talked of the dance that evening. David borrowed five pounds from the girl before they parted.

CHAPTER III.

DANCING and dances are very jolly sometimes, when there is a vital current circulating in the atmosphere to send everybody just a little mad. It's the kind of current that many people believe to flow permanently in Paris—everybody knows it—and really it cannot be generated in its entirety by champagne or cocktails, though many an excellent substitute has been excited by these means. Still, the real original is much better, and does not rely upon internal combustion and liquid fuel and all that kind of thing. There is a temperance plea, just to be in the movement. Strangely enough, however, some cynical humour of the Fates has made the after-effect much the same in both cases, so here is no argument.

This night at Covent Garden every kind of spark was jumping merrily. The ball was as bright and glittering as any ball; lamps shone o'er fair women and excited men, and mask pursued domino with zest and inspiration. Chains of shining lanterns crossed the body of the theatre, discreetly curtained boxes on the upper tiers were provocative of kisses, and altogether things were going well.

The conductor, like the harlequin-master of the world, swayed the dancers through some pleasant, stately movement—then, pulling another wire, set them jerking and jumping in mad accompaniment to the crazy bucket-thumping of an African settlement. But, later, while the dancers were moving charmingly in an old-fashioned waltz, the lights were suddenly put out, and at the same instant limelight shafts pierced the darkness

from galleries and upper tiers. Spectators looked down from above and were amazed, for the bottom had dropped out of the world, and through immeasurable depths of pierced gloom the dancers below swayed through space like streams of bright fairies. For a moment the shifting beams caught jewels and tinsel, red cardinals glowed, black monks stood firm while sirens beckoned, and then the lights came on and the orchestra, ashamed of its lapse into rhythmic beauty, blared jazz music at the swinging crowds. Now David and Sophie made their bow.

Their afternoon discussion and final efforts had achieved a highly topical success. Sophie appeared as a gigantic chocolate box, with one corner crumpled and torn and a little wax Cupid peering out invitingly. Her baby face and golden curls framed in a medallion in the box cover maintained the best traditions of chocolate box art. A huge blue silk ribbon tied across the corner in that bewildering method achieved by confectioners matched her pretty blue silk legs. The box, open at the bottom, reached halfway between her knees and waist and allowed plenty of freedom, though it prevented the more intimate methods of dancing. She looked very sweet and attractive, and triumphant too. Her array was successful.

But David, who had had a finger in Sophie's pie, could be trusted to go one better. He followed the girl's allusion, but came as a bottle of whisky done in pasteboard, with a huge label through which his Mephistophelian countenance appeared, and below, long, thin legs in tights, one leg white and the other black.

Now, with pleasant inspiration, the crowd of dancers separated, and on one side of the floor the men—monks, soldiers, cardinals, and clowns—followed the whisky

bottle, which danced ahead in long, high-kicking steps. Across the floor the chocolate box led the women, who followed with imploring gestures, and all the time the orchestra played Wagner with the fury of genius. Thrice around, and the leaders met on the stage—the music changed to a wedding-march—and bon-bons and whisky minced affectedly down an aisle formed by men on one side and women on the other. So they led the way to supper, while the music rang and crashed, and from upper boxes festoons of gaily-coloured paper, flowers, and beruffled caps came fluttering down on the mad and cheery throng below.

David threaded his way about dim spaces behind the stage. He was looking for a stool, for it appeared that Sophie's garb prevented the use of any other seat without acute discomfort. An occasional attenuated shaft of light penetrated from the auditorium and made the gloomy place even gloomier. Ghosts of unsuccessful opera singers gibbered behind every prop. Even the solitude-seeking lovers whom David had stumbled by in the dim passages dared not enter here. Perhaps it was the shades of highly temperamental *prime donne* that prompted David's brain.

The man found his stool, but did not return at once. Instead, he seated himself astride a trestle and pondered his affairs, which truly enough required consideration. He had no money. He had lost his job, such as it was, which at least paid his rent. This was the matter that gave David thought, for he would practise direst economy rather than give up his comfortable rooms. The niceties of eating, smoking, drinking, meant nothing

to the man—all that bored him—but he would not live in a bed-sitting-room. So he sat and pondered.

Jewels and precious stones had been in his eyes all the evening, and in the darkness and limelight he had been reminded of the Baron's dinner party, when his uncle had displayed his gems to him in a kind of Granville Barkerised 'Arabian Nights'' Entertainment. So the plan came to him, and the determination to rob his uncle became fixed and vivid in his mind. And now the means? His quick brain discarded instantly any highfalutin Raffles method. All that was impracticable. No, he had his footing in his uncle's household —he determined to change his manner with his worthy relatives, to become their adored nephew, to make his aunt love him. Already she was very fond of him. Now whom in that household could he bribe or bend? And the answer flooded his brain with light. Constance, of course—Constance, quite pretty, quite attractive, unconsciously a little disappointed and warped—he could mould Constance. "I wonder how old she is," thought David—"thirty-two or thirty-three; she has the keys—and, better still, she has everybody's confidence Constance: is herself the key," he decided. David grinned to himself, and brooded. "Must make love to her, of course—play her along—make her get the jewels some time when everybody else is out. Simplicity itself," thought David. "I can easily get as far as the jewels. And then Constance—after that . . ."

"Of course Constance must drop out," thought David. "Rather more serious," he decided, and frowned. He bit his lip and considered—hard. "I am in Constance's room with the jewels—how to get them out. I must have been noticed entering the hotel. I can't stroll out casually with a parcel under my arm, and not be noticed. My game is to be above suspicion—always

above suspicion." Inspiration came—another man. David suddenly hated that, but he could see no other way. "Now," he thought, "another man to be in the hotel all the time, been in for hours, meet me in Constance's room, take the jewels and walk out—preferably by a back way. We'll meet outside—he'll have to keep the case until things are quiet. I shall be arrested and discharged again . . . no proof or definite motive." And Constance again, reft of her charge, left to tell the tale. Suppose the other man did the dirty work—he should do all of it, decided David. Stunned her, took the jewels, with David lurking unseen outside. But then at the inquiry her dealings with David would come out. Give the police the tip of a handle, the slightest deviation from the natural course, and they had you. He imagined the scene. Question: "Why did you have the jewel case up there when your employers were out?" Answer: "Because Mr. David suggested that I should get it." "Ah, no," thought David, warily. "Most certainly Constance must be—killed, of course!"

But this other man. David was the last man in the world to share profits or place himself at the mercy of another's discretion. But he must have another man; he couldn't kill the woman himself. Through some queer strain in him, David was incapable of physical violence to another. He could conceive such an act and watch its development without a mental ruffle—the idea of deluding a woman and then killing her almost amused him—but he could not do the killing himself. He left the idea of an accomplice to simmer in his brain.

Now there was money to be considered. He must have enough to get on with, for the job would take two or three months. David conjectured that a plea

of ill-health would be good for at least a hundred from his uncle. Sophie might be used too ; and if more was required, old Champion, Frank's father—— David grinned to himself and then laughed outright, for he had his man. "Little Frank!" he murmured, happily. "The dear fool thinks I'm God." It never entered his head that there might be difficulties in the way of employing a public schoolboy to commit a murder. He laughed and slapped his leg, for he had temporarily discarded his buckram bottle, and movement was easier accordingly.

David found his stool and returned to Sophie, whom he found in a hastily assumed attitude of fatigue in a box on the upper tier. She perched precariously upon the stool and beamed at the man.

"I get a kiss for that, I think," remarked David.

She looked down at herself circumspectly. "It might be managed, I believe," she said, warily. "Don't be violent, Davy boy for Heaven's sake."

They kissed cautiously. "Delightful," said David, "but I don't care for these exaggerated forms of fancy dress when it comes to a question of life's necessities." He kissed her again. Then he was disgusted at himself and apologized decorously. Sophie was amused ; she leant over the box-front and gazed rapturously beneath her.

"There's Harold," she said, "and lots of nice boys I know."

"Business of jealousy," grunted David, who sat on the floor and did not even follow her rapt gaze. David was intrigued with his plan.

"Now he's looking at me—now he's waving!" Sophie waved vigorously. "Darling!" she said intimately under her breath, apparently to the vague Harold, some fifty feet distant from her as the crow flies. David did not stir. "How I hate Harold," he said placidly, and snored. He did not move when

Harold, accompanied by more Harolds in various raiment, burst unceremoniously into the box and swept away the willing Sophie, whom he saw in a moment carried shoulder-high across the floor, waving a glass of champagne and spilling most of it upon her admirers.

Everybody was dancing again, but it was all ultra-modern dancing, and David, mildly fastidious, cared nothing for the joys of indiscriminate physical contact.

He pondered. There were things to be done without delay. He must write to his aunt, go to dinner again, start the ball rolling with Constance; another letter to Francis Champion, to get that young man up to town. He lay and considered, until the first heavy rumbling of a wagon through the market behind him betokened near dawn.

Then he got up, and assuming paste and buckram, stalked mightily between the still noisy dancers. Mightily in fact, for from cork to toes David stood eight feet high in his pumps. He seized the radiant Sophie from the hands of Harold and moved towards the foyer, and when the man expostulated he glared at him with all the devilishness he could muster.

"Do something, Harold," cried the girl, an ecstatic victim to David's might.

"Er—this is my wife," stammered Harold hurriedly.

"Can you deny my right to come between a man and his wife?" asked David, one hand on his label.

"Dammit, take the man—not the woman!" shouted Harold.

But they went, and threw off their pasteboard, and the man took the girl home through the new smells of Covent Garden. Sophie cried for the end of her joyous dance, but David laughed at her, for the plan took better shape in his brain at every moment, and he was pleased with life.

CHAPTER IV.

Two weeks later David wrote to Frank:

"EBURY STREET, S.W.,
"*March 26th.*

"DEAR FRANK,

"I believe you're leaving school, for some absurd reason, next month. I may be wrong about your completely unimportant life, but that's what I think your people said when I saw them last time.

"Now, if this turns out to be the case, how would you like to come up to town and stay with me for two or three months, after a week or so at Codnor? You can't be in my rooms all the time, but I'll get you a decent place quite close. You'll be under my wing, you know, so don't imagine wild routs extending into the sma' hours and all that kind of thing. And don't come if you're developing champagne heart, or words to that effect. Funds won't run to it. But still we can experience a little meretricious gaiety together. Would you like to come? Write at once and tell me and don't say anything about it to your people—yet.

"Yours,
"D. HOLT."

Francis Claude Lutwyn Champion was a stolid, rather obtuse young man. He had not been happy at school and he was eager to be finished with it. He was dull—poor Frankie!—very dull, and the fact had been rammed into his head by so many foolish tutors that

no capacity was left him to combat the assertion. So he admitted it, and it was the worse for him.

One thing, however, had cast a radiant beam into the still pond of his schooldays, and that was his friendship with David Holt. David's last year had been Frank's first, but throughout his school life David had been a hero, securing all the glory possible in his day. Some shadowed reflection hung about Francis for a long time, since he knew David at home and could recount his exploits by the hour to other hero-worshipping fourth-formers. Their homes were near the same Sussex village, and David, though always a somewhat abnormal young man, was nevertheless common clay enough to absorb any quantity of adulation and the brand of hero-worship his small friend supplied. Besides, Frankie's people were well off—and there were advantages in that kind of thing. David's parents had found it difficult enough to spare the fees of the minor public school to which both boys were sent, and nothing was left over for holiday expenses. Frank's folks were rich, mentally inert farmer kind, with money to spare and the best will in the world to spare it. They thoroughly approved of David, whom they thought an excellent companion for their son, experienced and careful, and well calculated to reform Francis into the easy, worldly wise, companionable fellow they vaguely desired.

Now David had decided on the night of the ball to use this young man as his instrument. In the small local affairs of his life, whenever possible, he had made the boy pull his chestnuts out of the fire for him, and always Frank had been delighted with the minor portion granted as his share, or resigned to curt dismissal when the dirty work had been accomplished. Nor had he changed with years. Always David had been his idol,

always David had solved his doubts, offered suggestions, more often issued bored instructions. His letters and his rare visits made life worth living for the boy.

So when this letter arrived Frank was absurdly happy. In his fondest dreams he had not hoped for such a benignant Providence. In truth, he looked forward to the end of his schooldays with the eagerness of a home-sick lad of twelve years old. He replied at once, bursting with emotion:

"*March 27th.*

"DEAR HOLT,

"I was awfully glad to get your letter. We break up on the 10th of April, and I shall get to St. Pancras at 2.30 on the 10th. I do not know what platform. I shall be awfully glad to come and stay in London with you. My people want me to go to Norway.

"Yours,

"F. C. L. CHAMPION.

"P.S.—I should love to come. St. Pancras on the tenth, 2.30 p.m.—F.C.L.C."

Frank thought this letter almost too exuberant, but he sent it off, nevertheless. David, with an effort, gathered something of what the boy wished to express, and wrote again:

"EBURY STREET,

"*March 29th.*

"DEAR FRANK,

"Good! Then you'd better write to your people and prepare 'em for the shock. Tell them that you want to come to stay with me, and—don't lose your nerve—tell 'em you want a hundred pounds or so for spending-money. No, you can leave that till later.

Now, this is what you must say. Say that your old friend D. H. has asked you to stay with him in town for two or three months. Say that you're tired of this business of being a schoolboy and that you want to gain a little knowledge of the way the world goes about before settling down at Codnor. Tell them to consider this earnestly, because you'll have to ask them for enough money to pay your footing in town for some weeks. Now say that you want to do this very much, that you have plans for your own future, and that certain experience of life is necessary, but add that you are always ready to sacrifice your own inclinations to your parents' wishes. Rub that in—they'll swallow it. Then add a few expressions of goodwill and finish up with this: Holt has asked me to stay in his rooms for a time so that he can look after me. That's all.

"Send off your bomb at once.

"D. H.

"Oh, tell your people to write to me and ask me down to Codnor for a week or a few days. If they do I'll meet you at St. Pancras and we'll go down together. Then you can return to town with me."

These instructions shook Frank to the marrow. He could hardly conceive a sum of money, actual and tangible, greater than five pounds. And to ask his father—surely this was mere pranksome drollery. But he always obeyed David, and this time obedience jumped with inclination, on the whole. So he chewed his pen, and his lips, and wrote to his parents:

"DEAR FATHER AND MOTHER,

"I hope you are all very well. My old friend D. H. has asked me to stay with him in town for two or three months. I am tired of this business of being

a schoolboy and want to gain a little knowledge of the way the world goes about, before settling down at Codnor. Consider this earnestly, because I shall have to ask you for enough money to pay my footing in town for some weeks. I want to do this very much. I have plans for my own future and certain experience of life is necessary. I am always ready to sacrifice my own inclinations to my parents' wishes. ~~Rub~~ I shall love to be home again and see you all. Holt has asked me to stay in his rooms for a time so that he can look after me.

" Yours affectionately,

" FRANK.

" P.S.—Write to Holt and ask him down to Codnor for a week or a few days. If you do he will meet me at St. Pancras and come down with me. Then he will return to town with me.--FRANK."

This letter, of course, caused a tremendous fluttering. Mrs. Champion came down to breakfast rather late on the morning of its arrival and found her husband pacing the room, disturbed and angry. He began in a high vein as she opened the door.

" Look here, what the devil does this mean ? " he shouted, and he brandished the letter in her face. She recognized her son's handwriting.

" Don't be absurd, Francis ! " she said sharply. " How can I know until I've seen the letter. Is it from Frank ? "

She took it from his hand and read it slowly, while her husband walked about the breakfast-room, watching her.

" And what the devil does he mean by ' my old friend D. H.' ? " he grumbled. " Must mean David. We've known young David Holt since his perambulator days." He went and looked over her shoulder.

"And 'sacrifice his inclinations'!" he exploded. "And we've just asked him to go to Norway with us. It's absurd, you know—absurd. The boy must be going mad, you know—mad as a hatter."

He walked the room again.

"Oh, it's all right, I expect, Francis," she said, and stared at the letter again. "He's just been talking to some of the other boys. He's eighteen, Francis, you must remember, though he seems so much younger." She hesitated. "It would do him good, I expect, if he's set his heart on it. But I do think David might have told us first."

"Yes," said Champion briskly, "yes!" He was rapidly forgetting his wrath. "Better have him down. I like him—I like him. We'll consider the matter—tell Frank we'll consider the matter. I must have a talk with David."

Mrs. Champion wrote to David and asked him to come down to Codnor with Frank for as long as he could manage.

The boy's head had been out of the carriage window since St. Alban's, but he sat back in his corner as the train came into St. Pancras. One shouldn't be too obviously anxious to meet another fellow. David, with two more letters and a telegram in his pockets, all from Frankie announcing the time of his arrival in London, stood on the platform and grinned at the strong-looking, lanky youth as he lurched up and shook hands with a flush and an inarticulate grunt. It was pleasant to see Francis again. After a severe time in keeping one's end up it is always pleasant to be with some perfectly uncritical person.

"How's old Dacre?" asked David, and startled Frank. It was rather nice, thought the boy, to be

able to talk about headmasters like that, so friendly and easy. Quite probably Dacre came up to London and went about with David. By Gad, he could talk about Dacre like that now himself. There was something in this business of leaving school.

"Oh, well enough," he stammered.

"Good. That all your luggage?" They followed the porter and a taxi-driver consented to take them to Victoria. David said very little, and Frank nothing at all, and after two hours of foggy travel on conservative branch lines they reached the village station. Frank fell out at once, and graciously accepted his mother's embraces, while David busied himself with the luggage and pretended not to see. One never could tell with these fellows; an obvious kiss from a perfectly good mother might cause a sleepless night. Perfectly absurd. But he did Frank an injustice. Frank was very young for his years, but he had passed that stage.

David advanced and received kind welcome too. He was amused with the obvious result of Frank's manly letter, and decided that it had been the subject of many nocturnal discussions between his father and mother. Poor parents—they eyed their son with some discomfort, and the father even attempted a broad conversation about politics instead of plunging into the local news, as he was accustomed to do. But Frank's familiar embarrassment cleared the air. It became apparent that the boy had not changed so utterly from their conception, in spite of the bewildering letter, and soon they were all packed into the four-wheeled cart and talking cheerfully enough. David decided that the father would not have been miserable if his son had changed rather more, and mentally rubbed his hands.

Old Francis Champion was a sound section of England's backbone. Stout Tory that he was, he feared

that his politics were narrow-minded, and so he read too many newspapers and mazed himself in his attempt to apprehend broad issues. At the bottom of his heart he believed that every strike and accident in England was engineered by hostile aliens. But he dared not say so, and fell back on comfortable truths. It was all very bewildering. Things were in a rotten state—a damned rotten state, sir! But the heart of the people was sound—and he'd have used the words "muddle through" only he was deterred unconsciously by David's solemn face. He halted vaguely. Everybody was very silent.

"Got something to show you, David," he announced, briskly. "Changed the course of the old stream, Frank, put in a motor, and now we've got electric light all over the place."

"Ha!" said David.

"How does it work, father?" asked Frankie, perkily.

Now they were well away.

That evening after dinner they all sat in the smoking-room and talked lazily. Frank sat beside his mother, being more accustomed now to David's presence, and made gentle, fair-haired love to her. They had not damned his London proposal in their reply to him at school; and so, like a proper boy, he took the matter for granted—on the surface, though in his heart he palpitated.

Old Champion hummed and hawed a bit and racked his brains.

"David," he said, suddenly. "Come down and look at this stable installation of mine. No, Frank, you stay with your mother a bit—she's been anxious for you." He beamed on his wife and son, and led off the young man through the deep hall and comfortable, raftered

kitchens. David knew what was coming, but he felt peculiarly unhelpful at times, and so they stood vacantly before the stable buildings for several silent minutes.

"Er—my boy," began the old man. "You know you should have written to us before you suggested this —er—journey to Francis. We don't want to disappoint him——" he stopped.

"I know, sir," agreed David, heartily. "But I only thought of it while I was writing to him. It was thoughtless of me. Now I must be frank with you." David grinned to himself at the loathsome expression, which usually precedes unpardonable rudeness. "Francis is at an awkward time in his young life, and he has many rough corners which will never be shaped down here in the country. You won't keep him down here more than a few months before he'll be bored, and then he'll be too old to be tied to anybody's apron strings if he goes to London, as most certainly he will. I shall be abroad, too, then. He is not particularly strong-minded and he is particularly inexperienced——"

The proud father interrupted, but David silenced him.

"One minute, sir," he went on. "Frank will find it easy enough to get into trouble in town by himself. Not particularly bad trouble, not by any means the hushed-whisper trouble that is popularly supposed to overcome pure young men in London, but just an occasional beastliness that will haunt him for years after. It's a damn shame to let a boy do it. He's fair game, you know, in London—a young man like Frankie. It is all no good unless he feels really independent—unless he is he'll save it up until he actually is. But if he's with a man he likes he can feel free enough, and yet be steered into the way he should go, and, what is really important, he can be made to realize the painful triviality

of those same temptations. And you know we like each other—Frankie and I."

He stopped—the infernal hypocrite—though his remarks were true enough.

"He's lucky to have you as a friend, Davy boy," said old Champion, touched deeply. "I think he had better go, and feel his feet under him, as you say." He sighed. "You know, David, we shall be going to Norway in a few weeks, his mother and I. As you know, we always used to go every year, and it'll be pleasant to pick up the old threads. We had hoped that Frank might come with us this year as he's free from school at last. What do you think, my boy?" He turned rather appealingly to the young man.

"That would be excellent, sir," David exclaimed, heartily. "But why not leave it to Frank himself? Let him have his way; it'll do him good to decide for himself."

"Yes," said the old man, thoughtfully. "Yes. He had better decide for himself. I want to get him interested in the home farm here, too, David, you know. You know how interested he was and keen on the new machinery."

"More chance after I've got him tired of London," remarked David, shortly.

"True, true. I'll tell you to-morrow." They went back to the house and discussed modern farming until bed-time.

That was a pleasant week of spring sunshine, and desultory fishing, and daffodils in the grass. A delightful week. David meant to have all that kind of thing for himself, about his own house, before he was many years older. In the valley below the tiles and thatch of the village glowed cosy peace; the sun came slanting through the big tree on the lawn, and Mrs. Champion sat beside

David and talked about Francis : Francis and the farm, Francis and London, and Francis at school.

Of course it was all settled, and the boy was to go up with David next week. There had been no hesitation in Frank's choice—to his parents' gentle pain. The Champions were coming up to town in four or five weeks' time, on their way abroad, and intended to cast a parental eye upon the rake's progress.

"Good!" exclaimed David, warmly, when he heard of this. "We'll be very glad to see you, sir." Frank had his money, a cool hundred ; indeed, the old man had taken David aside, and told him to make Francis ask for more if he ran short. David assured him that he would see to it.

When they went, and the dog-cart drove up, the fuss seemed perfectly amazing to that cosmopolitan young man. He had quarrelled with his own people years before, when his father married again, and rarely saw or heard of them, though they lived in the same county. Frank's parents thought it was all very terrible, but Mrs. Champion had invented a romantic attachment on David's part to the memory of his beautiful foreign mother, and she quite believed the affair to be the tragedy of David's young life, and the reason for his occasional rare fits of gloom. They believed him to suffer bravely in silence, but often Mrs. Champion thought that he might confide in her a bit. She told him that she liked to have two sons, and wished she could be a mother to every lonely young man, and that he had two homes in Sussex—and so on. She was a darling. But David emphatically did not want two mothers, though he did not state the fact.

So they drove off, with affectionate leave-takings, tokens from old retainers, and so on. The same thing had happened on every occasion of Frank's return to

school after the holidays, but the ceremonies never appeared to pall on any one of the participants, except, perhaps, Frank ; and he was used to it. They opened the boy's trunk for the last time, and shoved in the last oddity, and began the final series of farewells. Mrs. Champion came round to the side of the dog-cart and put her hand on David's arm.

" You'll look after him, David, won't you ? " she asked, and the easy tears stood in her eyes. David promised.

CHAPTER V.

WHEN David reached his rooms in Ebury Street he found a note from the Baroness Giusti asking him to dinner that evening at the Hôtel Russe, where his uncle and aunt proposed to stay for some five or six months. It appeared that there were commercial ventures after the Baron's own heart to be found in London. David had anticipated this note, and congratulated himself on his return that day to town. His uncle and aunt had spent most of their time abroad for years, while the Baron conducted mysterious financial schemes in every continental capital; but they had crossed the Channel several times during that period and had made a point of looking up their nephew on these occasions.

Frank received the news of his lonely state that evening with inward pain, which of course he never dreamed of showing.

David had put him up temporarily in his sitting-room, until they had time to secure neighbouring lodgings, for it was no part of David's plan to have the lad camping at his feet for the whole length of his stay. Secretly Frank hated the idea of living somewhere else, but as usual he said nothing. David laughed to himself, for the boy's feelings were as clear as day to him, but, being David, he made no change. While he dressed the two shouted remarks to each other, and he soon had young Champion happy.

"London's your oyster, Frankie! Going out tonight?" he shouted, airily. Frank stammered, as he usually did when anyone addressed him directly. The light question raised a storm in his young heart. Lord,

here he was in town, unattached, plutocratic, with radiant vistas of theatres, music-halls, and hardly-to-be-imagined glorious possibilities stretching before him . . . inviting him to enter . . . acknowledging him—Frankie—as the kind of young man for whom they were so tastefully arranged. He was their lord and master. "Jove," thought Frank, "I'll go out by myself for a time." But words failed him.

"Er—no, Holt, I think not. I'm a bit tired," he replied.

"All right, you'll find books or anything you want sculling about. I won't be very late."

But Frank hardly heard him, he was so disappointed at not going out after all. He never considered the possibility of deceiving David, or even of bringing up the subject again. He was done in, simply done in, just because he hadn't had guts enough to say, "Oh, I'll probably have a stroll before I turn in," or "I may go out after dinner, I don't know"—oh, thousands of things he could have said, and Holt would have thought him much more of a man too! Confound himself—Francis Champion—he was always doing that kind of thing. Really, you know, it was a bit stiff—David came out, resplendent, and Frank wished his clothes fitted like that.

"Curse old Jimmy if he doesn't give you a decent dinner," warned David, and departed. But the boy was quite unhappy.

David found a taxi at Victoria and reached the Strand and the Russe in good time. He was pleased to be back in London, pleased to be dressed decently, pleased to be going to dinner with people who did the thing well. He wanted to get something out of his uncle, too, before the night was out. He wondered if he could raise a hundred. That, and Frank's little lot,

and perhaps another fifty from old Champion—he could worry along comfortably enough for three months. And then, he'd be dead, or in jail, or somewhere on the Continent and a rich man. David shrugged his shoulders dispassionately, and then laughed aloud at the really comic notion of borrowing money from the man he was going to rob. His uncle, too—that added cream to the jest. The cab stopped, and David tipped the driver generously. There was a song in his heart as he followed the porter along the hushed corridor to the Baron's suite.

"It is David!" cried Aunt Rosalie, and kissed him generously on each cheek, but with a quick eye to note how he took it. David took it very well, for it suited him.

"Not a day older, Aunt Rosa," responded the young man. "You know we look too much of an age for you to kiss me like that."

The Baroness beamed. "David!" she repeated, archly.

A loud roar from behind him startled the guest.

"Ha, ha!" shouted the Baron. "Not a day older—as I tell you, meine Rosalie." His uncle was being bluff, or about to be, David decided.

"And the young nephew," continued the financier, both hands outstretched. "Such a society man he is," and he gazed admiringly at his nephew's bland correctness. "How goes it, David?"

"It's very good indeed to see you both again," he replied, looking at them steadily. "I wish you'd live in London, uncle. Can't you manage your financial crimes over here? Surely the presence of you great magnates is not necessary when you arrange mighty schemes?"

The Baron nodded his head seriously. "But it is

that I am not a great man, my David. True, I am rich—a little rich," he added, with caution, "but not like your world-powers of money, no. And so I must be there, to run my little affairs, myself to see some man or other. They will not come to me." He shook his head again. "But I am to be in London a long time, my David," he assured his nephew. "And why do we stand?"

He tugged at a cumbrous chair, but David moved it into position for the Baroness, and picked up her handkerchief for her with an air. Aunt Rosalie expanded under the attention and care of a solicitous and nice-looking young man. She was still a very handsome woman, and David's thoughts travelled back to that evening when his uncle had lifted the curtain and shown him something of rude wealth. Aunt Rosa patted his arm and smiled upon him.

Now Constance came in, after a discreet knock, and announced dinner. David leapt to his feet and shook hands with the woman, noting with surprise her neat round figure and attractive face. Lips too thin, he surmised hurriedly—she's a bit warped. He smiled pleasantly into her face.

"It's Constance!" he said. "Are you frightfully flourishing, Constance?"

"Nicely, Master David, thank you," she replied, relaxing for a moment her too-prim expression. David, from the days of his youth, had always done that much for her.

"Oh, your Aunt Rosa can't get along without her Constance," remarked the Baron lazily from his chair. "And no more can I, Constance," he added. "It would be no studs—no anything, anywhere—without Constantz." He gestured complete helplessness at the idea, and David grinned at his uncle's accent.

"Soh—to dinner!" continued the financier. "And

you'll take in your Aunt Rosa and stop laughing at your old uncle—hey, my David ? " He pinched the young man's arm affectionately and they moved into the next room, where their meals were served privately.

It was a good dinner, as ever, served by experts for experts. The Baron and Baroness maintained a fire of minor criticisms upon the food and service, but from past experience David judged the matter to be by way of a *cordon bleu*. Just so, he thought ; all the better for David when the question of that hundred pounds crops up. For himself, he cared little for the ultra-delicacies of the chef's artistry and purposely made but a poor meal. He wished to establish a suggestion of ill-health in his aunt's mind, and he was aware of the best method. David knew his hosts, and worried not about talking until after the sweet. More important things than conversation were before them, and his uncle and aunt were not minded to deal with trifles at such a moment. Then, he knew, they would sit about for hours with port and liqueurs on the table and smoke. David preferred to get done with things and go somewhere else. Now in America, he believed, dreamily, forgetting his untouched plate, you just went in through a door, probably one of those infernal catch-as-catch-can swing doors, you know, and they grabbed you and forcibly administered two food-pellets, one marked steak and the other pie, and then they shot you out through a chute into the street. Something in that, perhaps, he mused—but his uncle shifted his chair slightly, and there was a sudden pervading air of relaxation from some great strain.

" And now all about yourself, David ? " commanded the Baron, with a suggestion as of descent from sublime heights.

David smiled a little and looked self-conscious, but

merely to gain time. "Confound the old idiot!" he thought, "always bothering about my affairs. Now what the devil is there to say—why, the old fellow had got him that job!"

"Well enough, uncle, well enough!" he replied, giving a distinct impression of vast affairs veiled by decent modesty.

"You get on well with Waldo, hein?"

"Waldo—Waldo?" puzzled David, wrinkling his forehead. Oh, yes, his recent employer.

"I have left Waldo," he said, slowly. "I have better things——"

Better things, thought the Baron, better things; give a young man a good berth, and instantly he talks of better things. But he was fond of his nephew; he was impressed by David's personality, and thought him a very promising young man.

"As a matter of fact," continued David, "I'm having a bit of a rest just now. We've been frightfully busy lately, and what with my own affairs as well I've been too busy to get much sleep, and the other day something went wrong with me, and I keeled right over, you know. Sent me home in a cab, and all that, and next thing, doctor told me to chuck everything for a few months or I'd get—er—brain fever or some rot like that, first thing I knew." David mopped his brow.

The Baroness had been placidly recovering from the effect of rather too much food, but the word "doctor" brought her up sharp. Already she was mildly concerned over David's loss of appetite.

"My David!" she cried. "My little David—so ill. He eats nothing. You must do exactly what the doctor tells you, David——"

"It's quite all right really, Aunt Rosa, nothing at all."

He put his hand lightly over hers on the table, and turned again to the Baron.

"I can't afford such things, you know, sir, and as they've offered me a job as manager——"

"Manager!" His uncle lifted his brows appreciatively.

David nodded. "—at a place somewhere up in the North. I must mark time a while until I'm fit enough to take it. Meantime I shall work at home for a couple of months; they're holding it for me. Worst of it is, this marking time in London is so deucedly expensive." He played with the stem of his wineglass and frowned.

The Baroness telegraphed to her husband.

"You will come and stay with us, David, until you're quite well!" he announced, enthusiastically. David shook his head.

"Uncle, that's very good of you, you know, but it won't do. I'll stay in my quiet rooms, I think, if I can manage it so that I don't have to leave town after all. You know you live too nicely and expensively for me to stay with you. I've got to get on, you understand, and it wouldn't do for me to get accustomed to so many pleasant things about, which I really can't afford for myself. No, I might be able to manage a quiet couple of months in the country, if I can arrange matters. That infernal doctor insists, you know. Really I can't afford doctors like that."

David smiled sadly at his aunt. He knew that any reference to his open-handed style of living pleased the Baron.

"You must do exactly what the doctor says," repeated Aunt Rosalie. "Now where did he tell you to go, my David?"

"Oh, that Harrogate place, with waters and all that

rot! Costs about fifty pounds a month, you know." He shook his head ruefully, and saw the table-cloth drag as she pressed her husband's foot beneath the table.

The Baron rose. "Take David into the other room, my Rosa," he commanded. "I will join you in two minutes."

And so it happened that David, an hour later, stood in the Strand outside the Russe with a cheque for a hundred pounds in his pocket, and cursed the taxi-cabs that flickered past him in the night breeze.

CHAPTER VI.

CONSTANCE sat bewildered on the edge of her bed. Amazing things had happened. She had been kissed, and kissed most thoroughly, for the first time in a comparatively bleak existence. Disconnected thoughts flashed to and fro across her mind like broken threads upon a loom. She clenched the counterpane in her two hands and tried to think consecutively. It was an amazing affair, and why had it happened? She got up and looked cautiously, even suspiciously, at herself in the looking-glass.

For the first few years of her service Constance had wondered vaguely, and at times wistfully, why no one ever made love to her. The Baron and Baroness knew many hotels in Europe, and through all of them the maid had followed her employers faithfully. Now, wherever she had been she had always been conscious of a kissing and a whispering, a scuffling in the corridors, the sound of a love-tap behind a half-open door, flushed chambermaids and too-stolid men-servants—always there had been this under-current and always it had swept round her decently lengthy skirts without touching her. Constance wondered why, for the first time in ten years. At first these whisperers and scufflers had eyed her doubtfully but hopefully as she approached, but of late years the murmurs had ceased as her conscious rectitude flooded the hotel passage, and only the sound of vigorous sweeping caught her ears as she passed the half-open door. Of late years, too, Constance had smiled superiorly to herself as she noted her effect upon

these flighty young things. Now she had been kissed herself.

"Oh!" said Constance, "oh!" and she clenched her fingers again and smiled at herself half ruefully in the mirror. She thought of the guilty young man who had done the deed, and a sudden uplift of happiness assailed her and nearly swept her off her feet. Constance sang like a bird—a decorous, sedate old bird with a drooping tail-feather or two—but still like a bird. She sat down again and pieced her fortune together.

It all began with the Baroness, over a week ago. Last Sunday week, in fact, and to-day was Tuesday. She had been brushing the hair of the Baroness, and her mistress remarked, "We haven't seen David for a long time, Constance. Do you know if the Baron has seen him lately?"

"No, madame," had replied Constance, discreetly, as was her wont. She was not a conversational woman.

"Can you find his address, please, Constance, do you think?" asked the nice old Baroness.

"Certainly, madame, from the Baron," she had replied. And she had got it from the Baron, and, afterwards, on the Monday, posted the letter in the hotel letter box.

There had been no reply, and the Baroness had gently worried, until the following Monday, when Mr. David had telephoned to say he was coming that evening, and she, Constance, had answered the telephone. She had thought nothing of it at the time. And then he had come, looking like a real gentleman, Constance thought (for without the slightest disrespect or even critical turn, Constance knew her employers thoroughly), and had shaken hands with her when she announced dinner. And still she had thought nothing of it. Then she had

been filling the Baroness' hot water bottle, at the chambermaid's tap just outside the bathroom, and hearing without thought David's warm friendly tones saying good-bye, in the sitting-room next door. She heard the sitting-room door close, and then Mr. David—— David—had seen her through the plain glass of the door, and he had come in and taken both her hands and pressed them. And her hands all wet, and her plain old black dress—she wished she'd had on the other. And he had said, "Constance, you are looking prettier every day—d'you know you're a very handsome woman?" She wished he hadn't said "woman." He held her hands and took a step forward, and she had backed away, and kicked her heel against the slop-pail under the tap. "But you look so charming, Constance," he had said, and looked straight into her eyes, and she knew that he liked her. And then he squeezed her hands again and suddenly had gone.

That had been enough, one would have thought, but it wasn't. A thrill of anticipation coursed pleasantly down her back as she sat on the bed. For he had come that afternoon with flowers for the Baroness, and everybody had been out but her, Constance. He had walked in with the flowers and put them on the table, and she had said, "Thank you, Mr. David, my lady will be pleased," and she was sure she hadn't said the slightest thing to make—and suddenly he had taken her in his arms and kissed her, Constance, not once but hundreds of times. Five times, she whispered with awe. And she hadn't struggled or anything. But she was so surprised, she pleaded with herself. Then he had said: "We're going to see more of each other, Constance. I'm lonely, and you've got to come out with me." Then he had kissed her again, and gone away suddenly, like he had last night. But of course he didn't mean

that about taking her out. Of course not—anybody would be glad to go out with him—he couldn't be lonely. What nonsense! She got up from the bed, pursed her lips, and patted her hair. But that ridiculous thrill still sang through her heart. The next door—the Baroness' room—clicked, and instantly Constance had put her fancies aside and was in the next room to meet her employer.

"Oh, so tired, Constance," groaned the Baroness, slipping into a chair, while the maid murmured sympathetically and took her hat and cloak. "And do you know, Constance, I walked through the market on the way back, and the asparagus was so cheap—— I'm sure they charged us ten times that for what we had last night." She sighed to herself. "And I saw David, and he asked after everybody, and after you, Constance, too."

The maid caught her breath, and moved to the back of the chair in which her mistress was sitting, but there was a looking-glass opposite.

The Baroness clapped her hands delightedly.

"You blushed, Constance, you blushed!" she cried, and roared with laughter. "But we all love him," she added whimsically, and shook her head.

"Madame!" murmured Constance, primly.

"'Tis true, Constance. Me, I have a passion for my handsome young nephew." She threw her hands back over her shoulders. "Constance, I am sorry—I forgot to put in my pearls when I was downstairs. You must go down and fetch the case. Now—or the Baron will be angry—so angry!"

"Certainly, madame!" Constance hung up her mistress' discarded garments, and departed. The Baroness wore jewels—preferably a great rope of pearls—on every occasion, and her husband loved her to do

so ; he insisted, however, on their instant return to the large jewel-case and the hotel safe directly she returned to their abode. Jewels, except his wife's individual possessions, were not to be worn in the hotel, except for dinner or some such occasion, nor were they to be left upon dressing-tables or like convenient depositories. They must be actually decorating the person of the Baroness, or in the safe. He had perfect trust in his wife's ability to look after whatever she was wearing. Also, his precious things were not to be carried about loosely ; the case must be brought upstairs, the jewels placed therein, and the case instantly taken back to the care of the hotel safe. His rules were never broken ; for twenty years they had governed his wife's disposal of the stones. But as he frequently wished to examine or make additions to his hoard, and as he was comfortably fat and lazy, and hated lifts only less than stairs, the duty of fetching and carrying the larger and smaller jewel-cases had gradually devolved upon Constance. Constance was so reliable, so safe.

The Baron would send her off for the case, and time her, watch in hand. "Constance walks down the passage," he would say. "Now she enters the lift—one—two—three—she is downstairs—click—she goes now to the safe-man—she gives receipt—the case now—a delay—she returns with the case to the lift—click, the grating—one—two—three—click—she walks along the passage—she is here." And as he finished Constance would fumble the door-handle with the case held tightly in both hands. The Baron would chuckle fatly, and so it had been, for years.

Constance, quite unimaginative about her trust, was leaning against the counter, with the clerk opening the large safe in the vault before her eyes.

"The large or the small one, miss ?" he cried over his shoulder.

"The large one, please."

He bumped it down on the counter before her, but keeping his hand on the case, pushed a prepared receipt form at the woman. Constance signed it neatly. Hundreds of similar small forms bearing Constance's precise little signature were tucked away in hotel files all over Europe. She took the heavy case—twelve inches long, nine inches high, and nine broad, and worth perhaps £80,000—and returned to the suite. It was Constance's private rule never to deviate in the slightest degree upon any pretext whatever, when she was employed in this manner. She opened it with her own key, the Baroness slipped the necklace into its place, and Constance returned to the safe. This time, of course, she received the receipt, and placed it in her purse with customary care. She nodded at the man and he beamed back at her—she was so neat, so sure, so altogether trustworthy, and he liked people like that. None of your ragging about, you know. There was no 'I just put it down and forgot to get a receipt,' no 'But are you sure it isn't there?' no demandings of managers, no heated, barefaced denials of a witnessed receipt. Nothing like that with Constance. Through all these hotels, the more responsible men-servants approved and respected Constance, but the women disliked her. She heard their frank but trivial confidences and wistful passions with complete unconcern—they were meaningless and bored her—but unfortunately her face looked for all the world as if she repressed acid comment with difficulty. They hated her silent, severe lips.

But at the moment Constance was even less concerned than usual with her fellow-servants. She was thinking about David. For if he had encountered the Baroness somewhere he must have known she wasn't in the hotel.

That seemed sound logic enough, even to Constance. But David had bought the flowers and hurried round to the Russe with them, directly after leaving the Baroness. It must have been just an excuse to see her, Constance, alone. She had heard of young men doing that kind of thing—read it somewhere. But for herself in real life—oh, no!

"Oh!" said Constance, trembling.

CHAPTER VII.

"I SAY, Holt," remarked Frank, "I hate carting about all this money. What shall I do with it?"

He had a cheque for fifty pounds and a bundle of Treasury notes in his hands, and he looked pleadingly across the room at David. David was buried in a deep arm-chair with his feet on the window-sill, pleased with the morning sunshine, and thinking how much better it was never to do any work.

"Better shove it in the bank," he replied, lazily. But the prospect of so much actual business, the suggestion of such self-reliant activity, overwhelmed Frank and he hurriedly disclaimed any such desire.

"Look here, can't you take care of it?" he asked. "I don't want to bother with banks—I don't know what to do," he admitted.

"They'll tell you what to do all right," said David, not wanting to be disturbed. "They won't scorn your hundred, or fifty either. Here, you can write your name across the back, and I'll put it into my account, if you like."

"Good man—where?"

David jerked in his chair as if he'd received an electric shock.

"No!" he said, briskly. "You can't do that. But I'll take you to a bank some time and you can cash it, and then you can give me the cash and I'll dump it somewhere, and you can have it when you want it. That be all right?"

"Ye-es," Frank said, doubtfully. "Take it all now,

anyway, Holt. I'm sure to leave it about and lose it or something."

" All right." David stowed the wealth in his pocket-book. " Better keep five out," he advised, and handed back that amount. " Lord," he thought, " I'm losing my grip. If something goes wrong, and they find young Frank endorsing his cheques over to me, people might talk about undue influence. Hundred to one against anything happening, but—safety first," said David. "That's a hundred and ninety," he thought cheerily, "all tucked away in my pocket. Eight months' work in the old insurance office."

" Why work, Frankie, why work ? " he asked, with apparent irrelevance, and stretched himself like a cat.

" Jove ! " Frank announced. " It's damn good to be here in town with you, Holt." He looked gratefully across at his host ; the woman in him wanted to rub his cheek against David's strong tweed. " What'll we do to-night ? " he ventured.

" Whatever you like," replied David.

Young Champion had been in town three weeks now, and until the slightest test arose posed comfortably as a somewhat blasé man of affairs. They had gone to a revue or two, and the older man's easy acquaintance with several of the most glorious ladies imaginable had filled the boy with admiring envy. In justice to Holt it must be stated that his acquaintance with the glorious ladies had been invented on the spur of the moment. David knew no woman, except Sophie. Frank wanted to propose a daring dinner, but he hadn't the nerve.

" Oh, I've got a dinner on to-night, though, Frank," remarked David, guessing his thoughts.

The boy was silent in disappointment, and David chuckled to himself.

" Don't see why you shouldn't come too. In fact,

a friend of Sophie's saw you at the Alhambra and wants to meet you. Didn't know if you'd care to come," he lied.

"I should like to." Frank tried to conceal his delight and surprise. "I should love it—hate hunting by myself. Fairly exciting, is it, Holt?" He tipped his head knowingly.

David threw back his head and roared. This boy was the nicest thing he had dealt with for years. He lay back and shouted again at Frank's worldly-wise expression. "Frankie, you'll kill me!" he spluttered. Never had he hoped for such a responsive instrument. He grinned as he thought of the future.

The boy was mildly annoyed, but that was swamped in the thought of the evening. Anyway, he consoled himself, he never understood David.

"Are we going, then?" he insisted.

"Of course we're going." David resumed his companionable air. "She's quite a nice girl, Frank, I believe. Don't snub her too hard. I think she has real people somewhere, and all that!"

Frank understood the claim to respectability. "Snub her, Holt!" he commented, truthfully but very nicely, and forgetting his airs—"snub her, you know I shouldn't dare!" He grimaced and they laughed together.

"Oh, you're all right, my young friend," David retorted, kindly. "Your people have some idea that you require a guide, but I'm sure you're perfectly able to look after yourself. Of course you are."

He watched the boy swelling visibly. "Now I'm going out," he added, "and I shan't be back till this afternoon." David never explained his own comings and goings, and Frank was unaware that David's lazy questions and comments pumped him, Frankie, dry of his every daily movement and encounter.

"By the way, are you serious about that music?" shouted the older man from the tiny hall.

"Yes," replied the boy. "Why not—you told me to send for the fiddle."

"So I did. I'd go to that Chelsea woman." The door slammed and David departed. He had suggested, quite wisely and in the friendliest spirit, that Frank should have some gentle occupation to keep the devil away. Champion agreed, without thought or expostulation, and when his instrument arrived from home he was going for an hour or two several times a week to an instructress in Sloane Square. Frank naturally gravitated to a woman teacher.

David went out and telephoned to Sophie. This was his first serious attempt upon Champion's *morale*, and he did not wish anything to go wrong. He was hurrying things up a bit, but that was David's way. Though the Baron had assured him that affairs would keep him in London at least six months, there was always the risk of the sudden departure abroad of the whole household, blowing David's plans sky-high. No, things had better be rushed, decided David—my liaison with Constance too, and he chuckled.

Sophie, as usual, was amenable to lunch, and they met in a restaurant in Panton Street.

"David, you look such a man of affairs!" she cried, wheh he arrived.

"I'm not, my dear," he replied. "Glorious leisure for us to play together, Sophie. I have got a stunt on, though, and I want that black-looking Tomkins or Simpson or whatever her name is."

He hesitated, then ministered to her pout.

"Not for me, little fathead," he told her. "A young friend of mine wishes to see life, and she's the obvious means. A champagne dinner for us all to-night, my dear."

" D'you want Lois ? " she asked, reassured.

" Lois is exactly the name I require," replied David.

" I can show a young man lots of life," she remarked, brightly. " You don't want anybody else, Davy darling."

" But I do," he insisted. " There must be four of us, and I want my own charming lady." He smiled at her. " And I don't want you getting interested in our young friend, and I don't care if Delphine—er—Lois does. I'm jealous, you see."

Sophie opened her blue eyes wide, and patted his arm like a jolly little proprietor.

" But you shouldn't lead a nice young man astray, Davy," she reproved.

" Why—dinner with a charming lady isn't very far astray," David replied. " Do you hate being led astray, Sophie ? "

" N-no," she beamed. " I like it. Only you don't lead me astray, Davy ! " She seemed provocative.

" Well, then," he said, blindly.

Sophie dropped her principles overboard. They lunched well, and discussed ways and means.

" Remember," continued David, " that I want five minutes with the Lois girl before we go into the show. You take charge of the boy, and then we'll change back, you see. We'll have supper afterwards, and lots of nice stuff to drink after hours. I know a good place."

" Who doesn't ? " scorned the girl. " I still don't think it all sounds very nice, David," she remarked, severely.

" Sophie, let us stroll up Regent Street. The other day——"

She smiled rapturous assent.

They all met in Coventry Street, and dined hastily before the theatre. Poor Frank was struck dumb by Lois. Admirable counterpoint to Sophie's sweet fluffiness, the girl was dark and slim, met David's cheerful banter with cold facility, and quelled the boy's leaping anticipations in a moment. That was her cleverness, for when suddenly her eyes melted to Frank, and her manner warmed to him while David was coldly repelled, the boy was thrilled by the change, and his natural awkward stiffness was instantly overthrown. So by the time dinner was ended and they were ready to move Champion was a happy young man, with his eyes shining and the bit between his teeth—he thought.

David left the boy to put their things in the cloakroom of the theatre, while he issued rapid instructions to Sophie's friend. Frank saw the three of them as he crossed the foyer, and his heart leapt at the thought of belonging to such smart people. Sophie stood by in her pretty pale blue frock, but David was leaning over the tall Lois, talking earnestly. He finished his remarks as Frank came up.

"There's more than dinner and a show in this for you. Don't let me down, Lois."

Frank thought he had called her Miss Something or other before. He didn't understand the words, so he dismissed the matter from his mind, as he always did in such cases, and claimed the pretty Lois with an air of joyous ownership. She smiled at him when he touched her arm, as if with relief at being freed from the other man, and while Frank's loyal heart disclaimed the notion, he couldn't help but be thrilled again. They found their stalls and were silent, but the boy did not hear much of the play.

Between the acts David and Sophie left their seats, leaving the others to delightfully intimate conversation.

Lois spoke with the slightest possible French accent—one of the cheapest and most banal tricks of her profession—but to Frankie it was all of the most ravishing. She was clever in her way, this girl, and she used her silly little repertory with decided effect. The rapidly relinquished handclasp, the vivid, intent turn of the head to him as she told him some lie, the impression of the two of them alone in the world, the unconscious pressure of her knee against his—oh, she played them all, and quite well!

In the second interval, however, a cynical observer would have chuckled, for very nearly she put her foot into it. Now, of course, she was telling him the sad, sad story of the man who had dragged her down, the old ivy-covered rectory and the lawns where she had played with her dolls—Lois had been a shop-girl in a place devoted to attractive undergarments, and she had chosen her profession coldly and deliberately after many talks with her customers—when to her horror she perceived that the boy was bewildered, knew nothing of her dragging down. Frankie, in the depths of his innocence, had not the faintest idea of her calling. Only adroit handling got her off the rocks. But it was smartly done, with a bent head, a convulsive clasp, and a dabbing little lace handkerchief, and when the others rejoined them, Frank had a hazy idea of a kind of Rock of Ages print, a girl clinging to a rock beset by storms, her pure eyes fixed immovably on the star of her immaculate ideal. Slightly mixed metaphors, but then Frankie's mind was slightly mixed—he had had a cocktail or two at dinner. David had engineered a sordid business.

The dreary show was nearly over when Holt, bored to death, gave the word, and they all filed out amid hostile murmurs. That brightened David up a bit.

Once outside, Frank was pleased to notice that Lois easily regained her poise and cold demeanour towards the others. He admired her for it. An icy hand had clutched at his heart when David suggested a move, for he had imagined the evening over, but when supper was proposed a warm glow of happiness swept over him again, and he saw endless vistas of delight.

They crowded into a taxi, and discussed the play perfunctorily, a discussion which degenerated by devious ways into a vehement argument as to the particular merits of respective night clubs. Sophie had arranged this, however, and she was more of an expert than the man. It had never been his life. "And you must talk to us, Davy, and tell us stories," cried Sophie, intent upon a successful evening.

So they talked, but Frank leant back in his seat and clutched the hand of the girl beside him. As the car sped on, he was only conscious of gleaming lamps in the darkness, and her warm presence.

CHAPTER VIII.

"Two ghosts sat at hell's gate," began David. "One was a young and vigorous ghost, full of keen ideas and aspirations, but the other was a battered old spectre, who knew all the lowest haunts and had grown almost opaque in the seamy side of ghostliness."

The girls knew their David and were silent when he talked, but Frank was younger.

"Real ghosts?" he asked, like a six-year-old at his mother's knee. Lois smiled at him and filled his glass again.

"Pukka ghosts," nodded David across the table, and continued. "'Then you still believe in all this kind of thing,' said the younger ghost, contemptuously dangling a foot and a half of rusty steel chain between his knees.

"'That's a pretty good issue chain,' replied the old ghost. 'Wraith and spectre, I've done some fair good work with that in my time, since I drew my first graveyard smell. Hell's changed since those days, though,' and he spat reflectively on the rocks, or rather, went through the recognized movements, for there was no appreciable result. Ghosts can't spit, of course, that's why there are none in America. A bright blue flame shot up from the cavern floor and brimstone fumes filled the air.

"As the billowing smoke wreathed the rugged walls the young spook leapt to his feet and hammered briskly upon a cauldron marked 'For Witches Only,' depending on a chain from the roof. But he desisted as he caught the old devil's scornful eye.

"'Takes one back,' he muttered, apologetically. 'Gas, you know.' For a time there was silence, broken only by the wails of the lost souls among the caverns, and the occasional arrival of a new one, like the flight of a gull.

"Are they going to haunt anybody, Davy darling?" broke in Sophie. "I'm sure I shall dream about it."

"Don't interrupt," said David. "'"'Tis my duty,' sententiously spoke the aged spectre, 'to examine you regarding your fitness for enrolment in the Corps of Ghosts—the old Devil's Own!' Raising his voice somewhat at the last words, he stood up and saluted gravely, while the young wraith assumed an attitude of almost impalpable attention.

"'It is my considered opinion,' continued the hoary representative of evil, 'that the entire concerted policy of ghosts has been at variance with the object desired. What are your duties?' he snapped out suddenly.

"'To gather souls for Old Nick' (here they saluted again), 'to give the alarm in case of missionaries, to haunt the Governor's property——'

"'Stop!' ordered the other. 'There you have it —"Haunt the Governor's property." Directly some poor mortal up above has forged a will and murdered his rich uncle, or suffocated his wife in her bath, or carried out some breezy little affair of the kind, up you go and haunt him, and get him back to a state of smug repentance. Haven't you thought—you never do think—that the murdering of his wife may be the turning-point in a man's career? Clearly, then, it is not your part to put him off further efforts by making his maiden enterprise, so to speak, distasteful to him. An entire reversal of common policy is indicated. A——.'"

"Oh, Davy, what are you talking about?" mourned Sophie.

"This is a great truth, Sophie. You must listen," said David. "'Yes,' murmured the youthful ghoul. The old ghost continued. 'A great deal too much attention is paid to this business of human life. You know now how unimportant you were. In the future your business is to cover up traces, rub out fingerprints, warn the murderer of any negligence——'"

David chuckled at the bewildered girls, and decided to try an experiment on Frank. He leant forward and spoke straight at the boy.

"'Your particular game will be unmoral reconstruction. Leave the so-called wicked with a cheerful sense of safety. Go to the good and point out the gain of—er—natural behaviour. Point out the actual benefit of a little occasional loosening, the relative unimportance of such an act—the complete unimportance to the world. Emphasize the gains; in the abstract—experience and knowledge of the world; in the concrete—the attainment of your goal—success—anything. Can one know life by sitting at the foot of an altar—by keeping aloof from one's kind? No, share in human frailty—what does it matter—know your kind and be a man—what does it matter——'"

As he spoke, David had been staring at the boy across the table, and Frank's eyes were fixed on his with painful intensity. David had been actually projecting his words into the boy's mind. He had always known, of course, of a certain influence he possessed over young Champion. There was a time, in his youth, when he had made the lad commit a petty crime for his sake, and afterwards stand up and confess it, quite oblivious of David's compulsion. He had stood behind the parents' tribunal and directed Frank's

mind. Then he had laughed as he laughed again now. It was merely the power of an abnormally strong personality over a very weak one.

"Give Frankie some champagne, for Heaven's sake," he said, cheerily. "Or will you have a toadspawn cocktail, Champion, with a baby's leg in it?"

The girls shuddered, and they all laughed, while Champion drank. The spell was broken, and Lois sought to regain the boy's interest, with rapid success. If David had been trying to undermine the boy's morals, the attempt appeared to have been perfectly unnecessary. Lois and champagne were all that was required; already Frank had forgotten the remarks. Still, he was more daring with the girl.

"I love it when you talk, Davy," Sophie remarked, reflectively; "but just at the end—I don't know—it was horrid." She shrugged her pretty shoulders in distaste.

David laughed at her and was silent. The two girls made bantering love to the willing Frank, and they were all very cheerful. David watched the boy, and grinned again at the effect of his talk. Nobody had begged him to go on, as they had to start. At that moment David decided to alter the method of his attack upon young Champion; he knew that Frank's natural inclination to right, though temporarily obscured, was much stronger than his natural inclination to wrong; therefore he would enlist the boy's support on a basis that appeared both just and moral. It seems absurd, but David made it plain. It all came into his head so clearly that he suddenly shouted with laughter and alarmed Sophie, who shook her head over her lord's incomprehensible moods. David relapsed again into silence, watching Frank.

Frank held his drinks well, thought David—he had some blood in him, though precious few brains. Couples

were dancing between the tables now, to the music of a subdued machine of sorts, and Frank essayed the matter with the dignified Lois. But his feet did not answer the helm, and he subsided gracefully into his chair—quite neatly, approved David. The older man ordered liqueurs, and then, picking up his Sophie, moved into the open space and began to dance. Lois and Frank whispered together with sudden laughs—David wondered if his scheme required any further finesse. He countered Sophie in one of her adroit steps, and performed creditably enough.

Now, as they swung past his table, he perceived that the boy was ready enough for the final act. He glanced at his watch ; ten minutes more. He wondered if the taxis he had ordered would be prompt ; one would do in any case. David, separated from his lady, leant against the buffet and surveyed the crowd.

People danced and drank in that curiously reserved manner which is so characteristic of English illegal gatherings. Our rakehell roisterers sit in a corner and drearily drink too much. David saw Sophie flicker by, charming and charmed, and he smiled. She was breaking the ice rapidly, and with a little more champagne all round she would be in her element. Frank, no doubt, thought it a scene of unrestrained gaiety. David caught Sophie's eye and nodded, and in a moment she swept down upon the boy and girl, at the head of a rapidly thawing throng. They crowded about the table. Obviously another drink was in order. Frank's round flushed face appeared, giving " Lois " as the toast, and David decided that the moment had arrived. He advanced upon his victim, and in two minutes his strong right arm deposited his protégé in a quiet street at the rear of the building. Two cars were waiting.

Frank, bewildered by the change to clean air and

decent starlight, clung to his Lois while she waited for David's instructions. He pointed, and the girl, pushing Frank into the first taxi, whispered to the driver and climbed in herself. David nodded, and the car disappeared into the maze of deserted byways. Sophie whimpered at David's elbow.

"I thought we were all going together," she wailed.

The man chuckled and kissed her in the blackness of the second cab, but departed abruptly when they reached her rooms. He left her resentful, and walked to Ebury Street, whistling cheerfully through the dark streets.

CHAPTER IX.

It was ten o'clock on the following morning, and David sat writing letters in his rooms. He looked fresh and clean as the dawn, and was composing a note to the Baroness, with his lips curling into a cheerful smile as he wrote. "I will attend to Constance," David thought—"time to see if that dart of mine reached her innards." He laughed delightedly. A pleasant customer in the mornings, David, always cheerful for breakfast. And he sang while he bathed, another good sign.

A taxi stopped outside and David pricked up his ears. He had been waiting for that, and shifted his chair a half-turn, so that his back would present itself to anyone entering the room. Frank stumbled on the stairs, hesitated a moment in the hall and came into the sitting-room.

He was a poor, dishevelled Frank, still in his crumpled dinner clothes, and his black tie pulled into a sailor's knot to make the people in the streets believe he had been home since the night before. It was a poor attempt. His general condition and state of mind were obvious to the most casual observer.

Frank felt desperately unwell. There had been a little self-pity in the taxi, but that had been swallowed up in his fear of what Holt would say and think of him, and in his physical wretchedness.

Many men have a certain drive in their memories, to or from some painful goal, that they remember all their lives. It may be short or long, ecstatically happy or very wretched, but it stands out amongst all other

drives. This was Frank's, and it had not been happy.

"Hullo, Holt!" he quavered, with a note of misery in his voice, misery enough to melt anyone but David. But it was not David's plan to be melted—yet.

"Hullo!" he replied, and turned slowly in his chair to meet the lad, his face a little worn, a little cynical, very severe. He drummed with his fingers upon the table as if he knew not what to say in such a situation.

"Er—Champion," he said, "do you propose to do this kind of thing very often?" He paused, and his tired eyes surveyed the lad. "I dislike it, you know."

The boy wailed inwardly but said nothing, only he kept his eyes fixed on David.

"I was writing to your people," the older man continued. He raised his hand involuntarily as he saw the pain in the boy's eyes. "Just to say that I thought—I thought you'd be better at home," he added, gruffly.

"No, Holt, for God's sake, no!" Frank burst out. "I didn't know—I didn't mean—it was the damned champagne, Holt!" He raved up and down the room in his agony. He was half off his head with nerves and depression. David saw it and changed his tone.

"Ah, Frank, why did you do it?" he asked. "I tried to find that girl's address—meant to come after you and get you—but I didn't know where you'd taken her—you pushed off so quickly in that taxi!"

All the minor events of the previous night were a perfect haze to Frank. He had little idea what had happened the evening before, beyond the main fact of the business. Apparently he had driven off with that girl—Lois was her name. He gestured speechlessly—actual physical nausea overcame him and he writhed.

"Holt!" he muttered, and was silent.

"Then you won't go home?" asked David, gently.

The boy shook his head. "I think," continued David rather awkwardly. "I think you'd better find another place to live for a while. I—I'd rather you did, Champion," he added.

Frank nodded dumbly. It did not enter his head to question the peculiarly sickening virtue assumed by the older man.

"Change your things," said David, with more kindness in his voice than Frank expected. "Then you'd better pack. I'm going out for a little while, but I'll be back before you're ready." He got up and smiled crookedly at the lad, then moved to the door with the gait of a very tired man.

Frank broke down and cried like a child. All this kindness was more than he could stand.

"Can't I show you, Holt—can't I do something——"

David paused with his hand on the door knob and looked over his shoulder. His expression was contemptuous and icily hard.

"By telling me, I suppose, over and over again, what a thoroughly nice young man you are really."

Frank winced at the tone. "No!" he cried. "Let me do something, Holt! Tell me what to do!"

"Ah, no!" said David, "I think not—not now." He went out.

Strangely enough, that worn appearance seemed to have left him completely as he purchased a rose for his buttonhole at Victoria, and walked briskly towards Hyde Park. Indeed, he was humming as he walked. He broke into a cheerful tune as he posted his letter.

When he got back to Ebury Street, two hours later, he found Frank pale and washed out, but in decent clothes and physically much better. Jimmy, David's landlord and a retired valet, had taken the lad in charge, cold-tubbed and dressed him. Jimmy was well used

to that kind of service through previous employers, and he cared well for Frank, though he did not understand a more deeply-seated depression than he considered the occasion warranted. He sought to reassure the youth with experiences from his past, but this was signally unsuccessful. However, he achieved much.

The two had a subdued lunch while David told Frank of his new abode, quite close, in St. George's Square. He had arranged all this the previous week and had made Sophie, dressed demurely and discreetly—dowdily, to her mind—inspect the place and carry out the necessary arrangements. Frank listened in silence; his life was smashed, he felt. He thought drearily of home, but he couldn't go home—suddenly, like this. And they'd all ask questions and he couldn't be asked questions—no, he couldn't go home. His mind revolted from the idea. He had been racking his tired brain for suggestions to soften David. If he could do something, perhaps, for David. When Holt had said "Not now," just before he went out, it sounded as if he might have wanted him, Frank, to help him in some way. But how could he help Holt—he wasn't fit to help Holt—he wasn't fit for anything but beastliness, he thought bitterly. But he'd try it.

"Holt," he said tentatively, when the things had been cleared away, and they were smoking in silence. "Holt, you said just now that I couldn't help you—not now. If I could help you—I wish you'd let me." His voice tailed off to a mutter—"I wish you'd let me."

The older man turned as if surprised.

"No," he replied tolerantly, "no." But he hesitated over the last denial as if he had something more to say, and Frank's brain, sharpened by adversity, caught the note.

"Do tell me," he pleaded soberly. "I might help-if I could just do something to show you——"

David got up and paced the room. He did not look at the boy.

"Champion," he said suddenly, "there was a time when I wanted you to help me. But I don't think——" he shook his head doubtfully.

"No, tell me," repeated the boy.

"I have an uncle, Champion," David announced, in a dull tone, "rather a melodramatic kind of uncle." He smiled wryly, and the boy nodded, though of course he didn't understand.

"He has papers of mine," went on the other, "papers that would make all the difference to my life. I'm going to get those papers—if I have to steal them!"

His voice increased in violence and he strode up and down the room.

"These papers are my property, Champion. They concern my people and myself. God knows what he'll do with them." The very crockery rattled as David tramped. Frank had never seen him even disturbed by emotion.

Frank's eyes glowed and he was properly alive for the first time that day. This was his chance to restore himself. Instead of abstract ideas of reform, here was a definite method.

"Holt, I'll help—you said I could help," he muttered.

David swung round, and with an obvious effort regained his self-control. He sat down heavily. When he spoke it was naturally, and with more than his usual deliberation.

"Oh, no!" he said, and eyed the boy. "Forget all this—too strong meat for you, I doubt."

The light tone, almost of contempt, whipped the boy's raw nerves.

"I'll help," he cried. "I'd do anything—give me a chance, Holt. I swear I'd do anything—anything!" And indeed he would have done anything.

Holt stared into the boy's eyes as if he were impressed.

"Perhaps you could—I believe you would, Frank," he said, for the first time that day calling the boy by his Christian name. Frank noted it, and his heart leapt.

"You know I would," he insisted.

David spoke with his usual composure. "Possibly —I dare say."

Jimmy, clothed for outdoors, knocked at the door, and announced the cab that David had ordered before lunch.

"Mr. Champion's boxes are down," he announced, sedately. Despite his comfort of the morning, Frank could have killed him for coming in at that moment.

The boy put on his coat slowly, with David standing by, both of them silent. But the older man came downstairs with Frank, and stood by the cab as he entered.

"Will you give me that chance, Holt?" he asked, his eyes imploring.

David regarded him impassively.

"Yes, I'll give you the chance, Champion," he said shortly. "Think about it, and about all this. It's all serious."

"I don't want to think. I'll tell you now," cried the boy.

"No!" said the other, and stepped back. "Come and see me the day after to-morrow. All right!" He nodded to the impatient cabman.

Frank drove away. He sat hunched up on the edge of the back seat beside his suitcase, and kept on muttering

between his teeth. "If he will—if only he will!" He had forgotten the actual events of the previous night, except that they represented a terrible crime that loomed over him, overshadowing his world, that he had to expiate to regain his place among men.

Had he analysed them, he might have found food for thought in David's actions and speech then, and his shining rectitude this morning, but he wasn't built like that. I fear poor Frankie hadn't enough brains. That was partly why David had chosen him.

CHAPTER X.

FOR nearly two weeks Constance had no fresh blossoms to add to her basket of memories. She was not perturbed, however—indeed, contrary to the conventional maidenly abstraction in things spiritual at Cupid's first tapping, Constance was never more efficient than now. It took her that way. But her mental comments were much kinder, and her charmingly sympathetic look when she surprised a kissing couple in the luggage lift won all hearts. I think Constance's lips looked less thin in these days.

But her avid interest in any conversation relating to David was almost notable. The Baron was much impressed by the young man, mainly because of David's general appearance. He looked so exactly as the Baron himself had tried to look at David's age—an attempt which had failed miserably by reason of God, ignorance, and lack of money. Rosalie liked him for being her nephew, for being a young man, for being handsome and attentive, and for saying nice things to her. They were very anxious about his health and frequently spoke about him and his medical treatment, to the concern of Constance, who could not imagine what had happened to David. Constance loved him because he had kissed her.

She decided shrewdly enough that his indisposition was not such as to detain the ordinary tourist, but she worried to herself, nevertheless. So when she heard that the man was coming, apparently in the best of spirits and health, her own spirits were so good and her

eyes so bright—roving, I believe, is the word, though its suggestion is subtle with relation to Constance—that the Baroness gently rallied her on the effect of springtime.

David wanted to meet her. All that afternoon the thought clung to her and arrested her mind in its daily duties. He had asked her to telephone to him, but that was not done. Constance never entertained the suggestion for a second. Servants never telephone to gentlemen. Gentlemen may trifle with servants, amuse themselves with them, deceive them, even on occasion give them babies, but the advances must be one-sided. If you had asked Constance what she thought David meant by all this, she would not have known. If you had pressed her, rallied her routine-dulled brain, she would have thought—but not said—"Mr. David is amusing himself." It was not for her to criticize his method. Aware of all this, at least subconsciously aware, Constance thrilled to the man's attentions, and hugged to her bosom all the dear, inarticulate thoughts of which a girl is capable. Of course he was playing with her, fooling her, but God bless him for thinking of it. Constance possessed an essentially humble mind, and she was betrayed by her starved life.

David, quick as he was, did not quite realize this. He had not expected her to telephone to him, but he volunteered the suggestion as general propaganda, to accustom her to the idea in case of necessity. He knew something of the barriers between himself and Constance's heart, but for some time he did not see that the garrison had deliberately discarded all defences.

So the next afternoon, following up his note like the keen young man that he was, he stood at the door of the Baron's suite, wearing a neat grey suit, smooth,

short hair, an engaging smile on his pleasant, brown face, and carrying a tasteful collection of roses under his arm. David had quarterings of Italian and Jew blood in him, but one would not have suspected it to look at the man.

Constance opened the door and stepped back as the young man entered.

"Mr. David!" She acknowledged him decorously, as though her heart were not leaping beneath her bodice at the moment.

"Is the Baroness in, Constance?" he asked, cautiously.

"No, sir, the Baron and Baroness are both out," she replied.

"In that case——" said David, and kissed her. Then he perched cheerfully upon the table and put down his burdens, including his hat. David had never been a cinematograph actor, and so did not wear his hat in the house.

Constance stood there while he watched her, her sedate bearing ignoring the caress, her prim face unchanged, but with a delicious quake at her heart. Then suddenly she hid her face and burst into tears. He was beside her in an instant, and comforted her like a schoolboy, with his arms round her.

"Come on, old thing—what is it, then?" he cried, after a moment.

"Sir, you mix me up so," she faltered.

"It's a standing wonder to me, Constance," he remarked, "that no man has done so before."

This made her cry again, inexplicably; probably anything he said would have done so. He kissed and comforted her, with cheerful resignation. Tears were nothing to David. They neither bewildered him nor utterly depressed him, as they do most men. To him,

they were just part of the mechanism, so to speak, to be adjusted as soon as might be, since serious discussion was impossible during their sway. He resumed his seat on the table.

"Constance," he announced, looking at his watch, "I have twenty minutes to stay with you, and you're wasting precious time."

The tiny suggestion of authority was enough for her. She stopped at once. "Sir, I beg your pardon," she said. Then she smiled at him through her tears, astonishingly, holding the man, for Constance's smile was rare and beautiful, and changed her severe comeliness to sheer lovable beauty.

"Gad, you really are a wonder, Constance!" he cried, and looked at her. Fancy finding all this in stuffy old Constance, he meditated; really, it was very strange, you know.

"Sit!" he ordered, and pointed to a chair, where she sat demurely like a servant seeking a situation, hands clasped in her lap, eyes fixed on his face. He shook his head at her, but had sense enough not to harry the woman.

"Now," continued David, answering the question in her eyes, "I came to see you because I'm very fond of you, Constance, and because I want to talk to you—oh, and because I'm getting fonder of you every day, Constance!"

"Then you mustn't kiss me any more, sir," she announced, somewhat unreasonably, and closed her lips tightly.

David accepted this as a direct challenge.

"But I shall kiss you, Constance," he cried, in high, commanding tones, and did so, several times.

"Indeed," he remarked, climbing back on the table, "I have great hopes of your kissing me back sometime—

in five or six years perhaps." No, thought Constance —oh, no; fancy—the idea! "I wish you wouldn't bring in all these interruptions," David added severely. "How can I tell you what I do come here for? Shall I go away then?"

"Oh, no, Mr. David," Constance replied, without a moment's hesitation.

"You'll never kiss me back, you know, while you call me 'Mr.,'" warned David. Constance looked very earnest, and said nothing.

"This is all very sufficiently difficult and annoying," continued the young man, lighting a cigarette and crossing his legs beneath him upon the table. He appeared the picture of contentment. "What I want to know, Constance, what I came for really, is to know whether you're going to put on your gladdest frock and come out to tea with me?"

"Oh, no, Mr. David!" replied Constance, horrified.

"There you go again, you see," David despaired. "If you'll only think for a minute, Constance, you'll realize that you'll do whatever I want you to. Won't you?"

"Yes, Mr. David," replied Constance, obediently.

"H'm," said David. "H'm. Constance, you shall come out to tea with me," he decided, and then hesitated, rapt. His quick ear caught the sound of a step in the corridor. "But not now—here's the Baroness!"

Constance jumped to her feet in real terror.

"Next week—promise!" hissed David.

"I promise," she said, staring at the door.

"And here is my darling Aunt Rosa," continued David placidly as the Baroness opened the door.

"David!" she cried, "I heard you"—and she presented her large face to be kissed; once on each cheek. David performed his duty nobly.

"Of course you did, Aunt Rosa," he said. "I meant you to."

"And flowers too—roses," cried the Baroness, looking past him at the table. "For me, David?"

"Well, I really brought them for Constance," David said, blandly, "but of course I shall be glad if you'll have them, Aunt Rosa."

"Constance, you're a blessing!" said the Baroness, as the maid helped her deftly with her hat and coat. "Does he dare talk to you like this?"

Constance murmured discreetly and departed.

"Now, David," ordered his aunt. "Don't be tiresome and sit on the table, but come over here where I can see you. Sit down there!" she commanded, pointing to a chair.

David obeyed; he liked the Baroness, or rather he possessed a slightly different sentiment for her from that which he felt for nearly everybody else.

If David were parsing the human race, as a schoolboy parses a sentence, you would find that he adhered with admirable accuracy to the grammatical principle that no member can exist independently of the subject or object—the subject being David, and the object, his wants. People were either attributes of the subject —servants of his will; or attributes of the object—means to his ends. Some were direct attributes, adjectives or adverbs, and some were particles, not of any great apparent value, but distantly holding their place in the general army of words marshalled by my lord the subject.

Thus Constance was one of his own attributes, of direct personal application, her character, and, alas! her life, modified by the subject. Frank was the same. The Baron was an attribute of the object; he even, paradoxically enough, and to David's idea most

wrongly, possessed the object—a fault to be corrected. In its present state the sentence was too complicated for David's liking. He liked simplicity, and his idea was identical with that of the parsing schoolboy; a nice, plain sentence with no frills. 'The man has the apple'—'David has the jewels'—subject and object directly and closely related. But he really liked the Baroness.

She scanned his absurdly healthy face, her kind eyes seeking signs of dread disease.

"You look better, I think, David," she announced, "but still rather tired. Tell me exactly what the doctor said."

"Oh, I'm not going to Harrogate, Aunt Rosa," David answered. "He said I could have other treatment, and I don't leave London now. I've been away over a week, you know. D'you know," he said, looking confidentially into her face, "that the Baron gave me some money to go to Harrogate?"

Of course she knew; she had prompted it.

"Yes, I know," she replied.

"Well, I think I ought to give it back if I don't go, and this other business may not be so expensive." David spoke seriously, but she laughed at him.

"My David," she assured him, "the Baron loves to give it to you. God knows he has enough. Don't you say a word to him about giving it back or he'll be so angry. And you know how dreadful he is when he is angry," she warned. It was part of the creed of the Baroness and Constance that the Baron—kindest and mildest of men—had a maniacal temper and displayed it at the merest whim. On the whole, the idea pleased him.

"Bless you, Aunt Rosa, you really think so? It will help, you know."

How nice, thought the Baroness, to be able to help this pleasant, attractive, well-clad, but so independent, young man. She beamed into his honest, open face.

"Of course, my little David," she said. Then she talked to him and told him her petty troubles and sought his advice. He took her very seriously—which the Baron did not always do—and was a great comfort. She kissed him maternally when he got up to go.

"About next Thursday, then, to dinner?" she asked. "You'll telephone to me, or tell Constance if she's here, the day before you can come, David. Or come to tea with me."

"Thank you, Aunt Rosa, I should love to. I'll do all that." He smiled at her and was gone.

But as David stepped into the passage and closed the sitting-room door, he hesitated and looked about him. It was an excellent opportunity to survey the geography of the place. The suite—Number 327—lay at the extreme end of the corridor, the sitting-room door commanding its whole length. Then the door on the right of the sitting-room is Aunt Rosa's bedroom, decided the young man, and the door on the left is the Baron's little sitting-room where they have their meals. They like to guzzle in peace, thought David severely. Where he had had dinner, of course. The Baron paid for good service, he remembered. Two more doors, one on each side of him. One must be for Constance, and the other my uncle's bedroom, decided David. There's the bathroom next down the passage, plain glass door outside, frosted glass visible within. All as it should be. These two doors, worried David —dammit, the man ought to sleep at least next door to his wife, but then wouldn't Constance, the maid, sleep within call of her mistress? David pinched his chin reflectively.

The door on his left opened and Constance stood before him. She had been straining her ears for the sound of his departure.

"Oh, is that your room, Constance?" remarked David, relieved. "I'll remember." Constance looked shocked. "But you're charming, Constance," he continued, noting her attire. "Are you coming out with me now?" But he didn't intend to take her. She had put on her best clothes and looked most attractive.

Constance shook her head.

"No," she said, half-whispering. "I just wanted to show you——" she stopped, praying for approval. David did the correct thing. He stood still and looked her over deliberately.

"That's all right—quite all right!" he said, in a moment. "You should wear something round your neck, my friend." The tone in his voice satisfied her, and she smiled a little, but David wanted to get away. Most earnestly he did not wish the Baroness to find him in the passage talking to Constance, ten minutes after he had said good-bye to her. With a quick glance round, he kissed her soundly, and prepared to dash away. But she held him.

"Mr. David, it's not all just fun for you, all this?" she asked in a low voice, hand on her breast.

"No, my dear, I swear it isn't," cried David, and kissed her again. This time he got away.

CHAPTER XI.

ALL that day Frank sat in his room, and stared out gloomily at the dripping trees in St. George's Square. It rained hard, and he was miserable, poor boy. In the morning he had left the house for a moment, but he felt as if the load of unexpiated sin upon his shoulders were visible to any passer-by, and so he returned quickly. Holding his aching head between his hands, he tried to concentrate on the assistance Holt would require of him, but that did not help him much. Frank was not used to mental effort of any kind, which was the main reason for his headache. He accepted the pain gloomily, for perhaps it would help to atone.

He was living for the next day and his visit to David. At rare moments he was almost happy, when he considered David's need of him—if only he could repay the man a bit, and wipe off this burden. It was true what he had said, he thought, and repeated it over and over again—that there was nothing he would not do for Holt, and to get out of this slough of misery in which he had placed himself by his own beastliness. Frank always added that.

Quite exhausted, he slept heavily that night, and reached David's rooms the next morning as soon after breakfast as he dared. But David was not in, and the poor lad kicked his heels for two hours in the familiar sitting-room. Champion was acquiring a retrospective habit, and he almost cried when he remembered how happy he had been here—how awfully happy he had been. He wondered if life would ever be like that again.

David came in briskly and nodded to Frank. The boy's heart sank, for never did man look less in need of vague help.

"Hullo, Champion!" said David, quietly. "Excuse me a few minutes, will you? I've got a couple of letters I must write." He sat down and busied himself at his writing-table for twenty leaden minutes.

Then lunch came in. "You'll stay, of course?" inquired David, and nodded to Jimmy. David's polite reserve froze Frank and kept him in the depths of gloom. He felt as if every common remark were abnormal, meaning something terrible that he could not understand. He hardly spoke through the dreary meal, and David did not help him. Holt looked busy and abstracted, the manner that Champion had dreaded. It made the lad feel infinitesimal, helplessly inefficient, a mere drag on the business of life. Certainly he felt unwanted. And in his dreams of yesterday he had imagined Holt as confidential, careless to hide his feelings, asking him, Frank, to help him as a comrade in some great need that shadowed Holt's life, as his sin cast a gloom over his own.

David briefly apologized again after lunch and returned to his letters. For half an hour there was no sound in the room but the ticking of the big clock in the corner and the scratching of the man's pen. Frank pretended to read, but the page was a meaningless jumble of letters. When Holt swung his chair round and spoke, the boy jumped as if he had been shot.

"Well, Champion," David said. "You had something to say, I believe."

"Yes, Holt," replied the lad, steadily. "I'll do anything I can to help you."

David was quiet for a minute, staring at the boy's

face. He was pleased with the lad's directness, for he had expected incoherent mutterings.

"You've thought over what I said to you the other day?" he asked.

"Yes," answered Frank.

Now David got up and paced the room, making Champion feel better, for the action seemed to wipe out a little of that icy reserve which sent shivers down his back. The older man spoke again, with his face turned from the boy.

"There may be nasty consequences for you, Frank," he said. "You've got into enough trouble already. I tell you that I think the job too big for you and that you'd better go home."

Frank jumped to his feet at this, but a rush of emotion choked his words. He gesticulated and sawed the air with his hand, his tired boy's face staring at the man. David turned on his heel and looked at him.

"You mean it, do you?" he said gently.

"Yes," gulped Frank.

"Whatever I ask you to do, Frank? Perhaps it'll mean stealing to get my papers?"

"I swear I will, Holt," answered the boy, without a moment's hesitation. For a fraction of time the old friendly David had appeared to him and he would have sworn anything. David stepped close to him and stared down into his eyes. He wanted Frank to remember this occasion, to remember the price he had paid to get back on the old footing. He did not want to waste time repeating the whole business. But the boy's beseeching gaze satisfied him and he smiled suddenly.

"Then we'll try it, Frank," he said, and for a second his hand rested on the boy's shoulder. Frank went back to his arm-chair, tears rolling down his cheeks, his heart glowing with happiness, while David returned to his

writing for a minute, to give the lad time to recover what balance he possessed. The whole world had changed for young Champion because the older man had graciously allowed him to participate in a crime. He noticed that it was sunny outside and that the sparrows sounded jolly.

"Oh, God!" whispered Frank. Relief flooded his heart. He bathed in the peace of forgiveness. How good, oh, how very good! When David turned round again the boy was fast asleep in the chair. David grinned to himself and tucked a cushion under the lad's head with a gentle hand. Then he selected the most comfortable chair in the room and read O. Henry with quiet enjoyment.

Frank woke up with the old pain gripping at his heart. Then he recognized the room, snug and friendly in the afternoon light, and sighed like the child that he was. What a jolly room—jolly smell of tobacco smoke—jolly old prints on the wall. There was old Holt, sprawling in the biggest chair, chuckling gently to himself as he read, as he always did! Gad—he couldn't get on without Holt. Perhaps Holt would let him stay there that night, if he asked him. He was always such an ass, he thought lazily, about not asking for things that he wanted frightfully. He never could, you know.

Frank wondered gently about what he had to do to help Holt. A little frown wrinkled his youthful brow, and he looked like a Madonna with the stomach ache. But Frank was not concentrating on plans. His fond fancies swept him away. He thought how well it would all go, how Holt would gradually begin to lean on him more and more. Holt would get a bit despairing sometimes—anybody would—and Frank would say just the easy casual word to buck him up. Frank

would be always there, always resourceful, not saying much, but frightfully determined. Then one day Holt would be here in this chair probably, things gone wrong, hopeless head between his hands, staring moodily out of the window. And the door would open—probably be a bit dark in here just like it was now—and Frank would step in quietly, with a bundle in his hands. He'd walk over to Holt, not saying anything, and put his hand lightly on his shoulder. Then he'd throw the bundle in Holt's lap, say carelessly, "Oh, here are your papers, old man," and then he'd go over to the bookcase and casually take down a book and begin to read. And then Holt would spring to his feet and come over and grab both his hands, throwing the book on the floor, and say in a voice choked with emotion, "Frankie, old man, Frankie—you've done this!" and he'd say, "It was nothing, Holt—nothing," and pick up the book and go on reading, as if he were rather bored. He would be rather bored, of course. After that Holt's face would always change whenever he looked at him, Frank. He'd probably have to help him again in some way. . . . Holt might get into trouble again. Endless vistas, like mirrors in a restaurant, of Holt in trouble filled Frank's mind. Frank would walk by in the nick of time, haul Holt out, say "Better keep straight, old man," and stroll on. Holt would gaze after him, brokenly. . . .

David finished his book with a final chuckle, and turning round, saw Frank's eyes open and dreamily fixed on space. He was extricating David for about the eighteenth time—indeed, the older man was having a perfectly rotten life. David watched him closely for a minute, and decided that fairly frequent reminders would be necessary to keep the boy's mind in a properly receptive condition.

"Awake, Frank?" he said suddenly. Then, as the lad stirred—"What was the name of that girl, Champion? I want to remember it in case she makes trouble."

Frank's little home-made world burst suddenly into fragments. He turned a wretched face to the man.

"Er—I don't know, Holt," he replied, helplessly. He had crashed to earth with a bump that had knocked the wits out of him.

"Oh, well," said David, "it may not matter. You probably know that there's no end to the trouble these people can make if they think they can get something out of it. We shall have to talk about it again sometime, but drop it now. I've got to tell you a story."

He turned wearily to his desk and studied space for a moment. David had decided to give Frank at least a sentimental interest in the matter of his plan.

"Now," he continued, and turned his chair towards the other, "you'd better have the whole business of this, Frank. It's only fair to you. I needn't tell you, of course, to shut up about it. You're the only man outside my people who knows anything."

He waited for the due effect of this remark, and was rewarded by Frank's strained attention.

CHAPTER XII.

"I DON'T know," said David shrewdly, "if your people ever discussed mine when you were about." He glanced sharply across at Frank, who nodded and felt rather guilty.

"Just so," said David. "Then you probably know that my mother died some years ago, and that it's my father and stepmother living down near Codnor? You know he's rather a big man in the Consular Service or whatever they call it."

Frank nodded again.

"Never got on frightfully well with 'em," David mused. "Never will. But that's got nothing to do with this business."

He got up, stared out of the window for a second, and sat down again. He had never been so confidential before. Frank sat in scared silence, afraid to speak lest he should make some deadly tactless comment and put David off utterly.

"Before my mother died," the older man continued, "my father went abroad to northern Italy, where my mother's people are fairly prominent. She was a woman of affairs too. And through his connexion with them he got mixed up in some frightfully financial scheme for securing a monopoly of all those water power plants there. You know they supply half Italy with electric light and so on from that part of the country. Well, people said that it was a German monopoly that he arranged, and anyway it was very successful, and caused a devil of a lot of trouble later on. Does all this bore you stiff?"

Frank breathed denial. "Go on, Holt," he muttered. It was mostly Greek to him, but he had caught some glimmering of affairs, and anything that interested Holt interested him.

"It went through, and everybody made a pot of money, and was happy. And then, of course, there was the war, and the trouble started. The Italian Government wanted to know who had engineered the whole business. That wouldn't have mattered, until my uncle—my mother's brother-in-law really, a Baron of sorts—arrived with letters from my father and mother implicating them both in the matter, and threatened to expose them unless he was bought off. Under the circumstances, my father didn't want the money he had made from the enterprise, but it cost him all that and all of their private fortune as well. And the shock and worry of it all killed my mother—that's one score I have against my uncle," said David, calmly.

"Here is the point now—and another score." David fixed Frank with his direct gaze. "They burnt the letters and papers when they got them, but unfortunately they didn't examine them carefully enough. Half of them were only copies, and my uncle kept the originals. Now he has begun the whole thing again, and there is no money left to pay him with. In Italy, exposure will mean disgrace to my mother's name and her family—my uncle's family, too, but he doesn't take these things seriously where money is concerned—and in England, of course, it'll mean utter ruin and disgrace to my father. Not frightfully sensational ruin, but official disgrace and the loss of everything he cares for."

David jumped to his feet and paced the room. "He'll commit suicide," he said. "We can't take legal proceedings, of course, because that would mean the

exposure of everything." He turned to Frank again and spoke clearly.

"The Baron's here in London now, with the letters, and I'm going to get them before he leaves town. I'm too well known in the hotel there to do it all myself; and I must have another man that I can trust to help me. Do you feel equal to it, Frank, now you know the whole thing?"

"Yes, Holt," replied the boy, drawing a deep breath.

David stared at him sombrely. "There's a woman who looks after the papers," he said. "She put my uncle up to this last stunt of his, damn her!"

Frank wished it had been a man. He would have liked to kill him. David could not have chosen a better story to hold the lad.

"Why, it's not stealing, Holt!" he burst out. "It's only justice."

"No, it's not really stealing, of course," agreed David, quietly. He appreciated the difference that made to Frank. Frank was too near the schoolboy stage to break easily a rigid law of life.

There was a lot of truth in the tale, as a matter of fact. David's father had been involved in the enterprise, and so had the Baron, for it was his business in life to deal with affairs of this kind. But the blackmailing business was merely evidence of David's perfectly good imagination. Indeed, when old Holt, fired by his success, had burnt his fingers rather badly in an attempt to pull off a similar coup, the Baron had stepped into the breach with his usual good nature and extricated his brother-in-law—with loss of income, truly, but with position and personal liberty intact. David's father was as indifferent to right and wrong as his son, but he was handicapped with ten times more ambition, and much less natural shrewdness. For a time the

old Baron had thought it his duty to look after his wife's relatives, and thus he had acquired a kind of proprietary interest in David. David, of course, was aware of all this, but it did not interest him, and certainly he refused to allow such minor considerations to cramp his style.

David's story was all that Frank wanted; it was dramatic enough to catch the boy's romantic imagination. He could do something to help Holt, who needed him—and it was such a fine, sporting thing to do. He could save the good name of a woman; he could save all these people untold misery. He clamoured at David to know his actual part in the work—he wanted to be up and doing—but Holt, composed again, and steady as usual, laughed at him and told him to wait. He warded off Frank's insistent questions and took him out to dinner in Soho.

After dinner, Frank, very happy, pressed his friend to walk with him in Hyde Park, instead of going straight home. It was a pleasant evening, and Frank was warmly excited, suggesting occasional wild plans and making mental pictures of additional successes. Visions of himself playing Raffles floated through his mind. But as they passed Buckingham Palace and entered Green Park, David shut him up with somewhat disconcerting abruptness, and began to talk himself.

"Now, my young friend, you listen to me," he ordered. "When your father comes up to town he'll be staying at the Russe, won't he? He's stayed there before. When is he coming up, by the way?"

"In about three weeks or so, I think," answered Frank, eagerly with his usual vagueness. "He always goes there—at least, he always used to."

"And he'll be going off to Norway at once?" asked David.

Frank admitted the fact.

"You see, we can't have your people about when the thing is pulled off, or they may hear about it in some way and make a fuss," David explained.

The young man knew very well that the newspapers would be full of the case, if it happened as he intended, but he did not wish to alarm the boy.

"Oh, yes, of course," said Frank.

"Well, then," David continued, "your part in this thrilling business is to find your way about the hotel: more precisely, to find your way to the Baron's suite. You can do that when you go to see your people there."

Frank thrilled with pleasurable anticipation.

"It's unlikely that your people will be on the same floor as my uncle, so you will have to go up the stairs to the third floor—anything that your massive brain suggests, Frankie boy—and thoroughly investigate the property."

"Why?" said Frank.

"Because, my dear thickhead, you'll have to meet me there when we make our swoop on the papers." David's voice and manner were more serious than his words. "We're not going in together, you know."

"Oh!" said Frank, regretfully.

"Look here, Champion," remarked David, impatiently, "we're both in this, and I've got to rely on you. I shan't give you anything to do that is too hard—only you'll have your particular job, and I must know that you can be trusted to carry it through. I'm sure that you can—otherwise I should never have placed myself in your hands as I have. But you can drop out now if you want to."

The injured Frank protested. "I only hoped we could do it all together, Holt," he said.

"So we can, except for one or two very small matters. Here's the general plan of action. In the next few

weeks—it may take a month—I shall find out where the Baron keeps my mother's letters, and the best way to get at them."

Frank was rather dismayed at the idea of a month's delay. He had hoped it would be to-morrow, or something like that, but he said nothing.

"Then one fine morning," David continued, "I shall tell you to go to a place near the Russe and wait until I come. You'll wait there like an obedient young man, and I'll roll up in due course and say, 'Now is the time, Frankie!' You'll go to the side door of the hotel, go upstairs, and straight to the Baron's suite, where I'll meet you, only I shall go in by the front way."

"But why——" began Frank.

"Shut up!" said David. "We'll enter the suite, I'll get the letters and give them to you, and then you'll push off again with them by yourself, go out the back way, take a 'bus straight home, and stay there until I call for you."

"But what about opening the door, and suppose somebody's there?" objected Frank.

"That's my business to arrange all that, and I'll see that nobody will be there when we make our afternoon call."

"I see," breathed Frank. He had complete and truly well-warranted faith in his friend's ability to arrange little matters of that sort. He brooded a little, as they walked along by the Serpentine.

"Can't I do more than that, Holt?" asked Frank, his courage gathered for a rebuff. "You arrange everything and take the letters—I only just carry them away!"

David considered Constance, and chuckled.

"Perhaps we can find something more for you to do," he replied. "Home now, I think, Frankie my friend."

CHAPTER XIII.

"LITTLE David, hein?" remarked the Baron, surveying critically the large jewel-case Constance had just placed before him. "This night, then?"

"He comes indeed," replied Aunt Rosa. "He is looking better, but I believe he eats nothing. The last time he came to dinner——" she threw up her hands in despair, and the Baron nodded.

"True, my Rosa, true!" he said. They dallied for a moment with the gloomy thought of a young man disdaining good provender, and then Giusti threw back the lid of the box and forgot David promptly.

Truly he had many wonderful stones. The Baron's taste approved them in any shape or fashion, and he had an amazingly true eye for value or a defect. In the top of the case very gorgeous necklaces and an amazing dog-collar of diamonds lay on cunning little velvet-covered shelves and trays, but in the large space at the bottom a surprising assortment of jewellery lay tumbled together; grotesque but barbarically expensive cuff-links that no normal man would dare to wear, tie-pins that reminded one of fake jewellery in a circus booth, next to a priceless and charmingly beautiful plaque of platinum and emeralds. The æsthetic expert would have mourned the rude contrasts, but the Baron did not care a straw for all that. Indeed, he was always on the look-out for good stones in a bad setting, for no one appreciated better the difference it made to the buying price. Giusti added a plain uncut stone he had purchased that morning, and picked up a jolly cameo, mounted on an absurd pin.

"It is pretty, that!" remarked the Baroness, looking critically over his shoulder.

"Bah!" replied her husband rudely, and tossed it down again. He pondered over the case, and made rough sums on a piece of paper.

"Con-stantz!" he bawled.

Constance entered quietly, prepared to take charge of the case. But first she had a question to ask.

"Is Mr. David coming to-night, madame?" she asked, carefully. "I must tell them downstairs about dinner."

"Good, Constance," approved the Baron. "Yes, he comes. What dost thou wear to-night, my Rosa?"

The Baroness leant over and took the large rope of pearls.

"The pearls. David has not gone to the North for treatment," she announced, somewhat obviously, for the young man was coming that night. "His doctor keeps him in London. David has affairs in town!" she added, mysteriously. Affairs only meant business to these pleasant people.

"So!" her husband nodded again with approval. "The young man is quiet, but he has force, my Rosa. Me—sometimes I am quite afraid of our little David!"

He laughed loudly and shrugged his fat shoulders.

"Dino, he loves you!" assured his dutiful wife, gesturing widely to show the magnitude of David's affection for his uncle.

"And you, Rosalie," the Baron replied, generously. "But naturally." They beamed at each other. "Now, Constance," he continued, looking at the case, "you will take this back?"

The maid approached silently and took the case.

"He loves me!" she said to herself in the corridor outside. But she had hard work to quell the small

doubting voice within her which repeated, "Does he—is it likely?" all the way down to the hotel safe.

Constance was in the passage outside the suite when David came blithely striding along at a few minutes before eight o'clock. She had been there for some time; in fact, ever since she had finished dressing her mistress. She liked to see David before anybody else saw him.

He caught the handsome woman by the shoulders and kissed her—once, twice, thrice. "Why, it's Constance!" he whispered confidentially into her ear, as if he had just discovered it. Constance looked pretty and confused and ten years younger when she was kissed like that. He laughed out loud at her, head thrown back, white teeth gleaming in his brown face, then banged briskly on the sitting-room door and went straight in, without waiting for the flushed girl to announce him.

"Hel-lo, uncle!" he shouted, for the Baron was alone and rising hastily from his chair. David pushed him back firmly. "Frightfully important people like Barons always remain seated when poor relations come to dinner!" he announced. They shook hands warmly, and the Baroness came fluttering—she was a big woman, but she distinctly gave that impression—from her room to welcome David. He met her halfway and kissed her, to her delight, while the Baron roared with laughter. Everybody roared with laughter. It was a joyous reunion—no one had been so happy for weeks. But it was simply because David happened to feel like that.

"This habit of kissing my attractive aunt is becoming too much for me, uncle," remarked David, holding the Baroness' hands in his own, and smiling into her face.

"Ah, she wouldn't let me kiss her like that—my

little Rosalie!" replied the Baron, sadly regarding his own figure.

"Oh, well, Aunt Rosa, just think of all the pretty women he must have kissed in his time!" said the young man.

The Baron shook all over with his chuckling, but his wife demurred plaintively.

"David!" she expostulated.

The Baron, with some self-denial, changed the subject. "Then you are better, are you, David?" he asked.

"Very well, sir, indeed!"

"Then you must eat more, my David," the Baroness insisted.

"Can't eat more possibly, Aunt Rosa. You watch me to-night."

"So I shall," she warned, and then Constance knocked and entered, with no trace of her recent confusion.

"Dinner is served," she murmured primly.

"Why, hello, Constance!" cried the young man, and deliberately winked at her. It was an obvious wink, blatant, broad, and vulgar, and it tickled the Baron immensely. He would never have dared to wink at Constance.

"Good evening, Mr. David," murmured the maid.

"Constance is so distant," sighed David, as they moved to the next room.

"Constance keeps us all at a distance," chuckled the Baron.

"And very properly, sir!" said Constance, as they passed her.

David laughed aloud as he waited for the Baroness to sit down. There were possibilities in Constance, he swore.

It is to be feared that the young man behaved very badly at dinner. First he whispered to his Aunt Rosalie, in complete defiance of all decency, and told her such

shocking stories that she quite forgot to taste her soup. Then he began on the Baron, and the rest of the dinner was punctuated by explosions of mirth, which increased in volume and frequency with the number of empty champagne bottles. David sat there, his black eyes shining, and coaxed his best story from the Baron, and the adventures of their wedding day from Aunt Rosalie. And in between he talked himself, talked a lot, and Constance lurked in the shadowy background, and sometimes adored him for being so clever and handsome, and sometimes wanted to put him over her knee and spank him for saying such wicked things. Altogether, the young man made it a most successful evening, and one that the Baron and Baroness remembered for a long time, though why our young friend David was taken this way to-night I cannot explain.

"Are you really going away, Aunt Rosalie?" he asked curiously, when they had reached the liqueur stage, for the Baroness had referred to her possibly imminent departure. "And leave my uncle alone in a large and dangerous city like this?"

"Only for a little while, my David," she deprecated. "And I want——" she hesitated for a moment, until the Baron nobly came to the rescue.

"You're to go too, David," he announced, firmly. "To Brighton, to look after her. We have arranged it all, and you must have a holiday, like your Aunt Rosa."

This was the Baron's way, David was aware, of signifying that he paid all expenses. His uncle was very good at that, David admitted.

"But when?" he expostulated. "Consider my frightfully important business affairs, uncle!"

"Consider them by the seashore!" chuckled the Baron. "The waves roll—hein!" He laughed loudly, apparently under the impression that he had made an

erudite quotation. "And you will have time," he added. "It is not for weeks."

"We go on the fifteenth," remarked the Baroness.

David pondered rapidly—that would be about the time old Champion arrived in town to look after his stewardship of Frankie. He saw no particular reason why he shouldn't be called out of town for the two days of Champion's stay.

"All right, uncle," he said. "For a good long week-end, anyway, and I think it's awfully decent of both of you to want me."

"Good!" the Baron cried. "Of course, my David."

"Besides," continued the young man, staring blandly at the ceiling, "I have long considered asking my Aunt Rosalie to come with me to Brighton, but I wasn't going to say anything to you about it, uncle!"

This doubtful pleasantry thoroughly appealed to David's uncle and aunt, and they shouted with laughter, though Constance in the background pursed her lips grimly, and ached again to have the young man across her knee.

"My David, you make me so tired!" said the Baron, wiping his eyes with his napkin. He spoke, of course, in the European sense of the words.

"And really, I am a very harassed man!" he continued, suddenly assuming a worried air.

"Why, sir?" asked David lightly. His infernal master, if he was there, must have chuckled at the Baron's reply, for it was the first time for years that David had really been taken by surprise.

"It is that I want to share in a very big undertaking," replied the Baron, with all the solemnity due to such an announcement. "And I must sell all my pretty stones to get the capital!"

David dropped his jaw.

CHAPTER XIV.

"HOLT!" said Frank, awkwardly, as David climbed into the Brighton train. "Holt!"

"Hullo!" answered David, securing his corner seat. "What's the matter now?"

"Holt, you haven't said anything—you won't say anything if you ever do happen to see my people—about that—er—you know——" The lad floundered.

"No!" David replied shortly. He glanced at his watch and then stepped down again upon the platform, catching Champion's arm. "Listen, Frank, my young friend," he said, seriously. "You did a very rotten thing, you know—it was a beastly thing to do—and I don't want you ever to think that it was even a possible or pardonable thing to do." Frank's lips trembled as he stared at the platform. "But," said David, pressing the boy's arm, "it seems to me that you know all that, and that you're doing your very best to make it all right. I like that, Frank. And, by God," Holt continued, completely sincere, "you didn't pretend to any sneaking pride in your own beastliness, or I'd have slain you."

Frank didn't know what he meant by this, but David had reassured him and made him happy again.

"Better get in, Holt," he said, watching the guard's earnest signs. "You bet, I'll try."

David leant out of the window, grinning cheerfully as usual, and shook hands with the boy.

"So long, Champion," he said. "Remember me to your people—I'll be back Tuesday or Wednesday—have a very good time, and, look here, if you're bored or

anything, go out to dinner with Sophie or somebody." He waved his newspaper and sat back as the train began to move.

The implied trust in his last words filled Frank's young heart with pleasure, and he strode manfully to the barrier with his head held higher than he had held it for some time.

It was half past eleven, and a jolly sunny morning, and the train bringing his father and mother from Codnor was not due for an hour. Frank, youthful and well-dressed and smart, felt that life was a pleasant affair after all, and sauntered towards a florist in Victoria Street to buy flowers for his mother. That was something he would never have thought of before his visit to David.

The boy's remorse was gradually becoming less insistent, and in his moments of distraction Frank achieved quite creditably the air of a young man about town. He had reached the stage at which the possibility of a parcel is forbidden. Indeed, a few days previously he had left David in Piccadilly to pursue his own affairs for three-quarters of an hour, while he conveyed home—as unassumingly as possible—a bulky parcel of two handkerchiefs that he had just purchased in Bond Street. Carelessly purchased, as Frank himself admitted, without considering how he was going to get the damn things home. As Frank very properly pointed out, a fellow can't walk about Bond Street looking like a Christmas tree, but he scorned David's mild suggestion that he should buy an envelope and a stamp and post them to himself. Holt was frequently quite frivolous, Frank regretted, about these matters. "It's just these little things, Holt," he had said, "that make the difference." And David had agreed, after some consideration, that perhaps it was.

But Frank was a very nice boy, and he decided that flowers with which to greet his mother, though a distinct blemish on the *tout ensemble*, were not perfectly impossible. So he returned to the ticket-barrier, and was pleased to see his people, and more pleased that they should see him.

"Well, Frank, well!" said his father briskly, and shook hands. Frank responded shyly, took his mother's quite unnecessary travelling rug, and accepted a maternal embrace with great strength of character.

"Frank, how very smart you look," whispered Mrs. Champion, and gazed lovingly upon the boy. It was quite right to notice these things, thought Frank, but quite unnecessary to comment upon them. Nice, but frightfully tactless—mothers always are. He shook off memories of long-past agonies at school and led the way to the station entrance. By dint of watching David, he had acquired a good manner with taxi drivers and he got his party off without delay.

"That all your luggage, father?" he asked.

"That's all—that's all," cried the old gentleman. "Rest all gone on up North."

"The Russe!" Frank murmured, and the porter slammed the door.

Old Champion looked out of the window as they sped up Victoria Street, and patted his neat grey trousers in placid enjoyment. He was pleased to be in town, pleased to be going off to Norway again, pleased to see his smart son.

"And how have you been getting along, my boy?" he asked, in the approved style.

"Oh, very well, thank you, father," replied his son.

Parents always ask that question, and receive that identical meaningless reply. Indeed, in answering it, Frank never thought for a moment that he hadn't

got on extra well, or that he was deceiving his fond father.

"Been to many theatres?" continued Champion, senior. "Lazy young devils the two of you!" and he chuckled approvingly.

"Yes, father. Er—I don't know," answered Frank, and racked his brains to decide the exact number. Champion didn't want to know a bit.

"You're looking older, Frank," said his mother suddenly. That was true, for Frank's pain and sorrow had been real enough to leave traces.

"But I've got to, mother!" The boy smiled back at her, covering his habitual embarrassment with an effort. The mother crooned gently in reply, but she didn't want Frank to grow up. She could see that he was changed, but she couldn't tell if it was pain, or just London and men's company that had changed him.

"Of course he's older," remarked his father. "Bound to get older, especially in London." He chuckled again, and, looking at the boy, remembered vividly his first experience of holidays in town. He might have been a gay dog, old Champion, with very little provocation; and Frank, if he had confided the account of his lapse to his father, would have found him a far more lenient confessor than David had proved. But Frank had no such intention. No, he was engaged in burying his sin as quickly and as deeply as he could, and except when David, for purposes of his own, brushed enough of the covering off to expose the grisly outline beneath, Frank never let himself think about it.

"Three hundred and twenty seven," muttered Frank to himself, as the car turned off the Strand and swung round before the big glass doors of the hotel. He was suddenly thrilled with the idea of discovering the Baron's suite, and I fear he paid little attention to his people

as they fussed at the clerk's desk, and finally trailed off with various attendants to the lift. The boy was no coward, and as yet he possessed no trace of nervous imagination to suggest vague and hideous possibilities. He looked round him with delight and noted the general air and geography of the huge place with an observant eye. This was to be the scene of atonement. How all these people would crumple up, wither away, before David and himself. "Jove!" he thought. "I bet that's the Baron!"—for as he turned to follow his party, a dark saturnine man crossed his path. Frank greeted the unfortunate man with a glare of such concentrated and malevolent hatred that the poor fellow, surprised and confused, apologized hastily as he passed for the unconscious offence he had no doubt committed.

Old Mr. Champion, who liked to do himself well, had engaged comfortable rooms on the fifth floor, and Frank, who was now having great difficulty in not treading like a cat, and in refraining from looking round corners before he advanced, and in avoiding his mother's troubled eye, noted the number with interest. Five-two-three. In that case, thought Frank, with acumen that surprised himself, if I follow this general direction on the third floor, I should come out within four doors of the Baron's suite. He panted to be on the scent.

But many delays were to occur. First they all went downstairs to lunch, and never was a longer or more tedious lunch. For a time Frank felt that he could not endure it, and tried to think of some excuse that would get him away directly after, only he realized that that would not help him to achieve his object. Then he became resigned, bided his time, and meanwhile became interested in expounding the real mystery of esoteric London. His father liked more practical

things, and asked him about the Alhambra, and Frank dealt with that too.

"Tell me what you do all day," commanded his mother. "Are you always with David?"

Frank considered. "Nearly always. This last week's been glorious."

"Only one glorious week?" said his father, sharply. "You've been up here six of 'em. More!" He cocked his eye-glass across the table at his son, and confused the lad.

"Er—this was the best!" said Frank, only saving himself by an effort from relapsing into sullenness.

"What ever do you mean, Francis?" cried Mrs. Champion. "Go on, Frank, tell us what you do."

"Oh, I go to Miss Sloane—I mean Miss Church, in Sloane Square, every other morning, and have music. I've been doing that for ages. It's rather genial."

"I'm glad you're keeping it up, Frank," said his mother, gratefully.

"It was Holt who made me go," replied Frank, loyally giving his friend due credit. "But I like it."

"Miss Church, eh," remarked his father. "Dangerous name, Frank—dangerous name. Don't get entangled."

He roared with laughter at his own humour—very coarsely, Frank thought.

"And then I come back, and Holt's usually writing or something. He had to go to Brighton to-day—business or something—or he'd have been there to meet you. Then we go out—we've been all over London this week—all sorts of queer places. The other day we went to tea in the Temple with a man Holt knew, and went all over the place and saw where Lamb and Goldsmith lived—genial old place," finished Frank with enthusiasm. He had recently adopted this word and

used it in and out of season. "We went up Fetter Lane after, and Holt made me buy——"

"Buy what?" asked his mother, as he hesitated.

"Oh, odd things," he said, lamely. She did not press him. Holt had made Frank buy a hammer, a coal hammer, in a queer little shop, and had told him to say nothing of the purchase. They had ragged each other about carrying it home. It had been a great joke.

"And what do you do in the evenings?" asked his indefatigable mother.

"Oh, we go out, or we talk about—about plays and books and things," answered Frank, colouring a little, for he wasn't used to deceiving his mother. As a matter of fact, they talked of little else than his part in the great undertaking; of the Baron's ignominy, of the woman who had suggested his latest wickedness, and of ways and means. Lately David had devoted a week to making Frank happy, without removing the boy's sense of his own obligation, and he had succeeded very well.

"Shall we move?" broke in his father, impatiently. He had that instant finished his cheese. Every one else had been waiting for him for some time.

When they got upstairs again Frank found it easy to get away, for both his parents wanted to lie down, under pretence of reading, and go to sleep until tea-time.

Frank, announcing some duties to carry out for Holt, promised to return in time to take them out to tea, and departed with rising excitement. Now was his time. He strolled to the lift, and with proper precautions went down to the ground floor. There he hesitated, and noting with some surprise that the hurrying throngs were not in the least interested in him, he felt in his pocket as if he had forgotten something, gestured

impatiently, and mounted the marble glories of the mighty staircase. Nobody paid the least attention to him, strangely enough, as he reached the third floor, and stepped off quietly along the wide corridor.

He seemed to walk miles along that red-carpeted corridor, but it did not feel at all dangerous. Frank was a little disappointed—he had expected more of this, his first essay in crime. Still, he had to find the back way out, David had impressed upon him, and there might be more to that. 319—321—323—325—and there was 327, large as life, and facing him. A queer warm thrill overcame the boy as he stared at the shut door. That was the place. By Gad, should he go in now—risk it—and get those papers for Holt? He felt just like doing that now. Holt would come back and find all his worries gone. The Fool took a step towards the door, but another door opened on his left, and somebody came out—a woman—and crossed in front of him towards No. 327 of his dreams. She paused—severe, quite unpleasantly severe—as the boy hesitated, and looked back at him inquiringly.

"331?" asked Frank, readily. He had been drilled by David.

"It's at the other end of the corridor, sir," said Constance, who was used to this.

"Oh, I'm so sorry—thanks so much," said Frank, smiling faintly, and turned briskly away. Constance shut the door after her. Frank disliked the severe look of her as he strolled down the corridor, and wondered vaguely who she was, but it never struck him that this, according to Holt, was the black genius who inspired the Baron with sin. It wouldn't have struck anybody. David frequently chuckled over this.

"Now," said Frank to himself, and turned off to the right, passing the main staircase and shafts and moving

towards the rear of the building. More miles of red carpet, a corner, and then he encountered a hurrying servant, who looked at him without any interest at all—let alone suspicion, thought Frank, rather bitterly.

"I say," cried the lad, smartly. "Isn't there a way down to the Embankment here?"

"Yes, sir," replied the servant. "Turn to your left, sir. The stairs are ahead of you, and the side door at the bottom." He received Frank's careless thanks and hurried on.

Frank descended a deserted staircase, crossed a lonely corridor, noted as the only sign of life a uniformed back at the end of a hazy vista of passage, and left the hotel by an unobtrusive swing-door. A dozen steps and he was on the Embankment. He strolled easily towards Westminster, feeling pride in his accomplished object.

Then he felt less satisfied. He cut viciously at the plane-trees with his cane.

"Bah!" said Frank. "You could blow up the whole damn hotel if you wanted to, and no one would ever see you."

CHAPTER XV.

"SURE to be the jolly old Metropole!" murmured David, glumly considering the whereabouts of the Baroness. He had forgotten to make the necessary inquiries before leaving London.

"Metropole, sir—yes, sir. Alone, sir?" said the porter, and selecting an opulent-looking taxi with an unerring eye, planted David's bag therein. None of the Brighton taxis are real taxis, which is so odd. Instantly he departed to seek more Metropolitans, who tipped largely, perhaps with a view, David mused, to securing all the courtesy possible for their fair companions. Otherwise, thought David, eyeing his fellow-passengers, people might be rude to them.

He drove down North Street, and through the Steyne to the Front. The sea was very blue, and the Front very white and broad in the sunshine. A big man in a seasonably bright suit strode along the pavement beside David's cab, with a number of gaily-coloured air balloons fixed and bobbing about his straw hat. Questionable charm, thought David, and viewed him with distaste. And this gay fellow had a lady on his arm, who was also somewhat ornately decorated. David viewed them both with distaste, and sighed.

At the hotel he found a room available, and upon inquiring for the Baroness Giusti, he was gratified to find she was in residence, and at the moment taking the air upon the Promenade. "All very satisfactory," said David, who was not worried by conventions, and he went forth to seek her.

The young man sauntered along the Front, observing the cheery but aimless crowds with interest. Brighton looked very pleasant indeed; people who like that kind of thing would have liked it very much—but David knew a little farm-house tucked away on the edge of Ashdown Forest which he would not have exchanged for a dozen Brightons. David was not particularly serious in his search for his aunt, and after a while he sat down on a bench overlooking the green lawns of Hove, and admired a brightly painted blue balcony of Oriental colouring on a house opposite him. The balcony was completely at variance with the rest of the house, but strangely in keeping with Brighton as a whole. A fair-haired schoolboy stumbled over David's long legs, apologized in a pleasant tone, and set him thinking of Frank.

A nice boy, Frank—David chuckled over him like a fond father. He liked the way Frank's mind worked —nearly as simply as David's own, in fact, though that did not enter the young man's head. He approved thoroughly the instinct that had driven the lad after the affair with the girl; it was a decent instinct to atone and to pay, with no excuses or evasions. Frank's weak character and plastic will he acknowledged without mental comment, for they were the obvious reasons why the boy had been selected as his instrument.

He had engineered Frank's fall from grace in a perfectly heartless manner, in order to bring the lad to a peculiar state of mind suitable for his embarkation in the enterprise; and the affair had been peculiarly successful, and everybody deserved credit, including Frank. That conclusion, by the way, would have bewildered Frank. Yes, he liked young Champion; David liked everybody in his gently superior way. It must be stated, however, that the effect of all this upon

Frank, the effect of the final stroke, the effect of success or failure, never intrigued David for a moment. He didn't care a straw what happened to anybody after he had secured the jewels. It was not his way to care.

David liked Frank, now, better than anyone else in the world. This needs a little elucidation. David would never have a real friend, any more than he could have a real wife. The men of his acquaintance would either be just acquaintances, and rather distant ones at that, or else slaves, and willing slaves, of his will. He had a great capacity for picking up slaves, and no capacity whatever for equality of relationship, whether with men or women. He was no recluse or solitary; far from it. If he wanted to shoot or fish, he must have a companion; and a Frank was his chosen partner. Acquaintances would not do for a position of that kind, being too liable to independent thoughts and desires, too uninterested in David's talk. David really could not spend an afternoon listening to some one else's conversation; it fatigued him too much.

A real wife would have fatigued him too. He would probably have had a so-called wife for the sake of accuracy of local colour; for as the completely idle young country gentleman of his intention, in an Elizabethan house with rose-beds and thyme and yew hedges, it was essential for him to provide an appropriately delightful woman to balance the composition of the picture. David's series of mental pictures would include one or two sections of Royal Academy favourites—extremely sunny and incredible herbaceous borders with still sunnier and mercifully incredible young virgins in muslin and sun bonnets in the left foreground. Also interiors with firelight and old oak and a tall woman in a yellow evening dress. But, bless you, that woman

would never be his wife, except physically and nominally. David's personality was positively monastic in its exclusiveness. He would marry the woman, and probably give her children, also probably make her quite contented, but admit anyone, especially a woman, into his limpid and uniform soul—it was impossible, and would be too hard on the woman.

His mind was far too simple for anyone to enter. Any ordinary mind has corners in it, little roads leading to unexpected places, blind alleys, too, and a number of possibilities to the explorer. A mind which is as unaccidented as space itself, possessing no light and shade, no variations of dimension, would overwhelm the explorer as the sight of God is alleged, in tenuous religious booklets whose sentences all begin with " And," to overwhelm the tender-footed young Seeker After Truth.

And David's mind was like that. It had a thin surface crust for the benefit of the world at large, and a delightful crust it was, too. Education, charm, high spirits, youth and enjoyment were all there, and formed a whole which compared favourably with both crust and contents of the minds of many quite presentable folks. But no one ever would, or could, get beneath this layer to the space in which David himself dwelt in unity of spirit.

Mind you, this crust had no artificiality about it. It grew on his mind like the protective bark on a tree trunk, and, again like the bark, it was charmingly varied in outward seeming. But the most important part of David—the tree itself, so to speak—was underneath, and mercifully remained so. Too much singleness of purpose is incomprehensible, and would be alarming if one could ever really take it in. No one ever has grasped David's, nor realized how it took the place, in

him, of ambition, love, and the other mainsprings of human action.

It seems absurd to credit a man with awe-inspiring singleness of purpose and to deny him ambition. I had hopes for a moment that this might prove to be a paradox of the kind which unfailingly betokens cleverness in the perpetrator; but it is no paradox. It all depends on what you mean by singleness of purpose. *You* mean a mind intent upon the attainment of some distant goal—an ambitious mind. *I* mean a mind lacking the innumerable small cravings and plans and intentions and temptations which embroider the ordinary mind. David's was free from all this. He would have had no wants so strong as to be compulsions if he had had money enough to live a pleasant, idle life, in comfortably artistic surroundings.

Everybody who came into David's orbit in an existence of that ideal kind would have served either his amusement, such as a temporary mistress or two, young friends who worshipped him, and dogs; or else his sense of appropriateness, such as a wife and children. They would all have loved him, for really he seemed eminently lovable; and he would have led an unobtrusive and more or less commonplace life.

But denied a sufficiency of money, his naturally innocuous, though actually inhuman, singleness of purpose became directed to the task of obtaining what he wanted to supply all his needs, and, while the crust over his mind remained unchanged, the clear and even space within became intensified, more vital, more active, and turned him into what we call a prey on society. But he wasn't. He only wanted to be comfortable. He did not want anyone else's money *qua* some one else's money.

One tells this story as nearly as possible as it occurred;

and since David based his scheme on the affection for himself engendered by his engaging and attractive manners, he must naturally appear attractive at times. But never was man less of a hero. David did not possess a friend whom he had not cheated or deceived. No persons in the world were really dear to him, but he pretended they were, so that he might more easily use them. If a man eyed him askance, was not a bit impressed by him, David instantly gave that man a wide berth; but if a man were pleasant to him and seemed attracted, David strove to magnify the attraction, in case he might be able to use the fellow for his own private ends. Frank loved him, and he ruined the boy. Constance loved him, and he planned her murder. He was heartless. He was evil.

The thought of the jewels came into David's head and he began to chuckle to himself. That was most amusing, and a very good joke at his expense.

Imagine going to all this trouble to get Frank up here, to intrigue with Constance, and then, with everything going swimmingly, to hear the Baron announce callously his intention of getting rid of the jewels! That really was funny, and David laughed—laughed so much that a woman at the other end of the bench got up hurriedly and moved away.

He had been so surprised that his uncle had been quite annoyed. Then, with repressed chuckles, he had gathered his forces, and, as tactfully as possible, tried to persuade his uncle that he wasn't getting the price for his pretty things that he would if he held them until later. He had had to be careful, and make a clear suggestion that he was only interested in the matter because of his liking for his uncle. David thought he had done so, and anyway the Baroness would tell him if he had succeeded. That was what he had come here for.

Some instinct made him look up, and he saw the Baroness bearing down upon him, with a broad smile of welcome, and leading something unpleasantly noisy upon a leather thong.

"Say not so, Aunt Rosalie!" implored David, jumping to his feet, both hands outstretched—"not—not a Pekinese. Anything but that!"

"But he is delightful, David—my Peke!" his aunt expostulated. "He is to be adored."

"Better Chow than Ming," remarked David, abstrusely. "Not by me, Aunt Rosalie! Get out, ugly!" The dog's insensate yapping filled the world.

"But he is not ugly, my David—not very ugly. There—it has happened!" The Baroness, bending down either to choke or to comfort her darling, had slipped the lead from her wrist, and already the dog was a yellow streak in the distance.

"That's much better," said David, complacently. "Smartly done, Aunt Rosalie!"

"But he is worth—oh, hundreds—and he is not mine—I was taking him for the air, for a lady that stays also at the Russe, but is now in Brighton," explained the Baroness, with rapidity.

"Better still!" comforted David. "Somebody's sure to find him if he's worth all that."

"Oh, David—what she will say——"

"*Tant pis*," said David. "How's the Baron?"

"Dino is well, but very angry," answered his aunt, in an awed tone. "He told me all about it last night, but I did not understand very well, for he was so angry."

"Ah!" said David, very interested.

"Yes. They want him to put in more money than he has got. I do not know what it is all about, and it is the first time he has not told me that. Men to dinner

all last week, and talking all night. Me—I was sent away!" The Baroness finished plaintively.

They were walking along the sea front towards the hotel now, and the Baroness had completely forgotten the dog.

"What a shame, Aunt Rosa!" remarked David, with sympathy. "Now I should always ask your advice." He smiled at her.

"I think you would not, my David," answered the Baroness, with shrewdness that surprised the young man. "He talks of leaving London now. But I do not care. I am glad to be away. I am tired of London and of that hotel, where I think something terrible will happen."

"Nonsense, Aunt Rosalie!" David assured her.

His brain was working rapidly. So the Baron was talking of leaving London. Then, by Gad! he'd put the thing through this week. Yes, he thought it could be done. And he strolled on, eyes fixed on the ground, considering his tools, Frank and Constance. In that brief moment he settled the span of Constance's life. Constance should bid farewell to this dismal world next Saturday. And the Baroness chattered at his side. David—cold-blooded fellow—thought the talk was losing its interest.

"Then my uncle has finished his business?" he asked.

"No, it has not—what you say—come off. He is furious still. Last night everybody talk very loud, and then go away, still talking, without coming to say 'Thank you' or 'Good-bye' to me. Then he come in—oh, how angry he is! And talk nearly till it is time to catch the train to Brighton." The poor lady yawned reminiscently. "That is all. It is finished. I am glad."

"H'm," said David, in deep thought. So his uncle would keep his jewels—at least until he, David, would relieve him of the burden. Well, that was all right. David might have saved his advice at dinner that night, but he gently surmised that his shrewd old uncle had paid little attention to it. Now he wanted to get home and find out how Frank had managed his affair.

"And he would not let me have Constance, my own maid," continued the Baroness, with self-pity, "because he is too fat and lazy to carry up the large case, and he will only trust Constance!"

"Poor old Aunt Rosa!"

"He comes down to-night, and still he leaves Constance in town. As if Constance could prevent the stealing of anything!" said the Baroness, taking life hardly.

"Gad!" thought David to himself. "What a chance. I will return and make hay while the sun shines on the lovely Constance." He decided quickly. "I'm glad he's coming down," he said aloud, "because I'll have to be away all to-morrow afternoon. I'll be back in time for dinner, though."

She hardly heard him, for she was wrapped up in her own troubles now.

"David, I will not walk another step," announced his aunt, suddenly realizing that her cumulative injuries had reached the limit. She sat down upon a convenient bench.

"But we're just there. The hotel's across the road," expostulated David.

"David, I will not walk," stated the Baroness.

"Then you shan't, Aunt Rosa. Let's all go home in a barouche. I'm sure barouches flourish in Brighton." David looked about him doubtfully. "Would you know a barouche, my dear aunt, if you saw one?"

"No," replied the lady. "I have driven in the hansom cab. The hansom cab is very difficult and dangerous," she said, simply. David loved his aunt.

"Here's just the thing," he said briskly, and hailed the driver of an ancient vehicle. "Climb in, Aunt Rosa. Imitation of The Late Queen—very difficult!"

They crossed the road in style.

CHAPTER XVI.

DAVID and Constance were walking out. Constance thought it was silly, and David didn't think anything about it at all. As well as silly, Constance thought it was absurd, and mad, and rather frightening, and altogether delightful. She murmured, very respectfully, something of all this, except the delightful part, but it had no apparent effect upon her companion, who insisted on behaving in a most childishly lighthearted manner. So they strolled along the Embankment this pleasant Sunday afternoon, towards Westminster and an unobtrusive teashop David knew in Victoria Street.

For the first time in her life Constance possessed a friend. And since like breeds like, and her distant manner was really mostly manner, of course she had to have a second friend, of her own sex, with whom to talk about the first. She was very discreet, however, and though David would have regretted, had he known it, the necessity for a confidante, he would have been charmed at Constance's loyal secrecy. This friend was rather pretty, and some four years younger than Constance, whom she envied for her capable manner and position of trust. But of course she had a young man, and was prepared to listen agreeably to Constance's adventures if Constance did the same kind office for her.

Now Constance, in her rare moments of mental ease, was becoming a very pleasant woman. Sometimes she hummed, and sometimes she sang, and at all times she paid more attention to her personal appearance than she had ever done before in her life. And the result

was truly satisfactory, for the existing groundwork was excellent. Even the Baron and Baroness, kindest of people, went in less awe of her. So much so that one day the old Baron, with delicious fear in his heart, distinctly ogled the girl. But as the Baroness was present at the time and roared with laughter at the episode, one may consider, perhaps, that the occurrence was not so important as Constance might have feared.

Almost David, I think, would have loved her if he had heard her talk. Constance would be busy in the morning, fussing with the Baroness' clothes and doing all the thousand and one things for which one cannot pay a servant, and her friend would stand by with a feather duster.

"My friend's a lieutenant!" said the other woman.

Constance dreamed. In a fraction of time David had led his troops to bloodstained victory, gained armour of medals, and was entering the room on his return home with one empty sleeve pinned to his coat. Constance flushed; then thought of him in his grey suit.

"Oh!" she said, meaning interest.

"Or a sergeant—I always forget!" continued the friend, with quick repentance and a little laugh. But, bless you, that meant nothing to Constance.

"You have to be nice to soldiers, don't you?" remarked Constance, vaguely, who had never been nice to a soldier.

"Oh, I knew him before he was a soldier," replied the other, flicking industriously with her weapon as some one moved in the sitting-room. "We were boy and girl—you know—I knew him ages ago."

"I expect so," agreed Constance, with no offensive intention. The friend eyed her doubtfully—Constance was always doing things like that.

"But you only like civilians, don't you?" she said, willing to forgive and forget.

"Yes," answered Constance at once.

"Tell me, Constance, is he everything that you—kind of wanted?" asked the other, sitting down on the Baroness' bed.

Constance removed her. "Yes," she said.

"No—is he really though?" pressed the girl.

Constance went to the window and looked out, and laughed happily. David was out there somewhere, and so it was very nice out there. She nodded her head.

"Do you love him awfully?"

"Of course I do," replied Constance. Words cannot express how she enjoyed all this. But now she was shaken.

"And does he love you like that?" pursued the inexorable girl.

"Yes," muttered Constance. But she was an exceptionally truthful person. "No—I don't know," she said, miserably. "No, of course he doesn't."

Constance's friend was quite a nice friend, and she came rapidly to the rescue and found Constance weeping gently. Anything more absurd can hardly be imagined. It would have been silly in a child of seventeen; in a woman of over thirty it was perfectly ridiculous. So her friend assured her, with some briskness, and as Constance instantly appreciated her own dignity they parted in a brief passage of arms—to meet again the next morning. Perhaps it wasn't so absurd, though, for you see Constance always knew, very deep down, the truth of her relations with David. Now she stepped demurely beside him, while he endeavoured to break down her sedate manner. But that required action, David admitted to himself, to do the thing

properly, and he barred kissing girls on the Embankment.

In a little while they sat in his tea-shop, more or less secluded by a partition and a curtain, and with this Constance allowed something of her happiness to show. She was very smart, Constance, in a suit that would have surprised her mistress, and she knew that she was not making her man uncomfortable. But she misjudged David. He liked his ladies to be smart, as indeed they invariably were, but in Constance that was less than nothing to him, though he appreciated the evidence of his influence over her. He wanted Constance to think that he minded a lot.

"You're looking very pretty," he said, quite seriously, "and it's very pleasant to come out with you, only you ought to be a little more pleased, considering that I came up from Brighton just to keep you from being lonely."

"Oh, Mr. David, I am pleased," she cried, and laughed at him across the table—actually laughed in his face. David was thrilled. He had had a very hard three weeks with her lately, for Constance, with the best will in the world, was an extremely hard nut to crack conversationally.

"Talk to me, Constance," he commanded, his elbows on the table and his head between his hands. "Tell me what you think, and what you do, and what you say."

She looked confused and pretty, but then caught sight of her reflection in the mirror opposite, and that gave her courage.

"And what you would like me to do," he continued.

"I don't want you to do anything, Mr.—David," she said, "except just keep on like this."

"What a dull time of it you must have had my dear!"

"Oh, no—I don't think so. Yes, I expect it was dull. It would be dull to go back to it now, without—without anything." She meant without David, and no one knew that better than the young man.

"I couldn't!" said Constance, after a moment's thought.

"You shan't, then," murmured David, and smiled at her. Of course she could not, for this smart Constance was going to be put out of the way when he had finished with her, because she might give his game away. It seems incredible, but it was not in the least incredible to David. The young man, however, did not mean these cruel little ironies; he simply said the obvious thing that the occasion demanded.

"David!" said Constance, directly, and looked at him shyly to see how he took it. He was pleased. "David, did you mean what you said in the corridor—you remember?"

"Of course I meant it," replied David, with infinite patience, and wondered what he had said.

"I don't mean about it being just fun to you——"

"I meant that," put in David. Constance was telling white lies, he thought.

"But about wanting me to wear something round my neck."

"Oh!" said David. "Yes, of course. Well, it's just what you want, Constance, to complete the glorious effect." And he kissed his hand to her across the table.

"I haven't got anything, Mr. David—I wanted to tell you." Constance looked ready to burst into tears.

David shouted with joy. She was a very literal young lady.

"My dear girl," he assured her, "as if it mattered. Some time when you have that big case upstairs you

can look for something that suits you, and ask the Baroness about it. But don't worry about that."

"I don't know if I could do that!" whispered the girl, rather in awe at the prospect. It was so outside her previous thoughts and existence.

"You must do exactly what you like, my dear, and nothing you don't like. It's perfectly unimportant." David spoke a little impatiently, as if he were thoroughly bored with the idea.

"Of course I could get the case some time," said Constance hurriedly, "and then, perhaps, ask madame."

She was so utterly and hopelessly honest, so completely honest in impulse and thought, that it was not the borrowing of the ornaments without permission that seemed awful to Constance, but the deviation from the routine of life.

"Yes," agreed David, a little wearily. He did not wish to appear strangely eager, or he might set the girl thinking. But the stage had to be arranged for next Saturday. The lamb was to be decked for the slaughter.

"I'll tell you what, my dear," he continued, brightly. "Next Saturday we'll have a perfectly good afternoon between the two of us. We'll dress in all our best clothes and go to a swish tea-shop and pretend we're frightfully rich—just to buck us both up. Rather a special day together, you know."

Constance was very pleased. She did not understand why that day should be so special—any day was a special day when David was there—but men were inexplicable always. It charmed her that he should set his heart on a particularly happy day, and choose to spend it with her.

"But my mistress," she said, doubtfully.

"I believe they'll be going off to Brighton again," said David. "Aunt Rosalie said something this morning about going down again next week. They're enjoying themselves. Shame not to take you, Constance, but we're both glad they don't, aren't we?"

She answered his pleasant smile. "I always stay behind," she explained, "when the Baron is busy with affairs, to send on telegrams and telephone messages. And some one always has to stay when the jewel-case is left behind." For the first time she perceived her own position of trust, and was pleased with herself for the sake of her lover.

"Very important young woman indeed," David commented, properly impressed. Then he pursued his subject.

"Well, what about Saturday, then?" he asked. "If my uncle and aunt do go away. You'd like to come out with me, wouldn't you, my dear?"

What a silly question, thought Constance. As if she wouldn't!

"Yes," she said, demurely.

"And put on all your nicest things? You shall wear all the prettiest things in the case, and make me proud of you. Will you, Constance?" He threw back his head and laughed, both hands stretched out towards her.

"I will, Mr. David," said Constance earnestly, throwing her scruples to the winds. It was rather hard on the woman. In a way she was shrewd, and she remembered an ancient maternal saying to the effect that men were easily put off, and she was desperately keen on this new thing in her life, so keen that she would have done almost anything to avoid the little carelessness or negligence which might bore David. Which was precisely the effect that David wished to leave in her mind.

He grinned inwardly and devoted himself to removing the troubled look from her eyes.

"D'you suppose I could kiss you in here, Constance?" he asked.

"Oh, no, Mr. David!" replied Constance, shocked, as he had known she would reply. And yet there was such a lilt of joy in her voice at the idea that David positively loved her—for at least thirty seconds.

But of course he did kiss her, and talked to her about himself, using his delightful imagination, and then about herself and her charms, until Constance was so happy that she didn't know what to do. And then they sauntered back to the hotel, where Constance entered by a back door that interested David immensely, and which he afterwards pointed out to Frank. Constance went upstairs to her room to go over it all again, and David went back to Brighton.

CHAPTER XVII.

DAVID could not sleep that Sunday night, for some indigestible reason or other. He got up when it was barely light enough to see, escaped from the hotel by stirring a sleepy porter, and walked towards Rottingdean, keeping as near the sea as possible. Daybreak was gloomy, and grey, and depressed, but it was quiet and solitary, and suited him. Loss of sleep affected him at once, as it does most healthy people. He felt vividly awake, peculiarly receptive, rather queer, but not ill. Halfway to Rottingdean he left the road and walked across the short grass to the edge of that quite dangerous cliff, and lay on his stomach looking over the edge.

"At, say, twenty minutes to five next Saturday afternoon, I shall be approximately rich," David remarked to himself, and yawned. He nodded his head regretfully over the months which must pass before he could obviously enjoy his gains.

"Constance!" The waves splashed gently beneath him, and seemed to repeat the name. Everything was a little mad so early in the morning. Unfortunately David did not possess that troublesome affair known as a conscience; its still small voice had never even whispered to him. He craned over a little further and stared down. "Constance" and "Death"—certainly the waves were murmuring correctly.

"What are the wild waves saying?" said David, and yawned again. "I'm sure the waves would have said the most interesting things to the late Charles Dickens in a case like this." David was overtired.

The waves splashed beneath him, and David shrugged his shoulders helplessly. Then the sun, which had been trying for some time to disperse a low bank of clouds in the east, succeeded gloriously, and exhilarated everything. The smooth, black rocks shone in the golden light, the little pools glittered, and the waves changed their tune instantly.

"There you are, you see," said David. "You didn't mean it." He shook his head reprovingly, and grinned cheerfully at his own foolishness. He sprawled comfortably on his side on the wet grass. Behind him a fold in the country-side hid the only buildings which might have spoilt the prospect, and far and near David could see the sun shining on the downs, and rolling up the sheets of mist like a servant busy with the blinds in the morning. Not my country, thought David, but very jolly. Now there was a lark, very suddenly, circling madly upwards as if he were late for heavenly matins.

"Hurry up, lark," said David; "you'll get the deuce from St. Peter." The lark was aware of this and was soon out of sight. David watched him until he disappeared.

"Leisure, by Gad—leisure! Then the world belongs to you." David rolled over on his back. "I'd sell my soul for leisure." It was such a mad morning that he rather expected the devil to appear and make him an offer, but nothing happened. He turned again to the sea.

"Hello, waves!" said David, flinging down a pebble. He listened carefully, and thought he could detect an undercurrent of "Constance" and "Death" in the splashing.

Poor old Constance, he thought—and poor old Frank. But they were dreary people, he explained to the sea,

and they didn't know enough to lie out on the downs in a jolly sunrise. They were nice people, though, and he was sorry it couldn't have been some other pair.

Constance was just about getting up now. She had five more mornings to get up. How unpleasant these things were. In a couple of hours Frank would be posting round to the Russe to say good morning to his people, if they were not already on their way abroad. Then they'd both be in the hotel, and really neither of them knew anything about what was going to happen. Poor innocents—poor silly sheep, thought David, and then he laughed, quite pleasantly.

He pondered again over his plan. It was short notice, but he had decided to carry it through, if possible, on the following Saturday, for the Baron had definitely announced his intention of leaving London for Paris within two or three weeks. He would have liked Frank's people to have been away rather longer than a week, but it gave them time enough to reach the almost inaccessible little Norwegian village which they loved. Letters and newspapers were hoary with age before they reached that quiet spot. David planned a letter which Frank should write to reassure his people.

David dismissed the actual murder and theft from his mind; he knew that was all clearly arranged. Frank would go home, after David had made sure of him, and stay there until the older man came. Then things became uncertain, for David was not quite sure what would happen first. He intended to get back to Ebury Street very soon after the murder—he had a plan for an alibi which he developed later—make sure that he was not already being sought by the police, and then go quickly to St. George's Square to dispose of Frank and the jewels. This he proposed to do simply enough by sending Frank home to Codnor by a late afternoon

train, with the jewels in his suitcase. There was only a caretaker in the house, and Frank could have as many *crises de nerfs* as he liked without rousing any particular excitement. The rehearsals David planned would drill the boy in his active part in the crime, but they were no preparation for the nervous shock of the real thing, and for the subsequent reaction. Therefore David could not depend on instructions, however frequently repeated. He dared not allow Frank to depart without first soothing and looking after him. He feared a collapse in Victoria Station, an hysterical confession to the nearest policeman. With all that business settled, David intended to return as quickly as possible to his rooms, there to await the arrival of the police. He thought it impossible to get out of the inquiry; in fact he was quite sure that he would be detained either for evidence or on a direct charge. But also he was sure that they could prove nothing against him.

He expected to be discharged from custody within a couple of days, and then he proposed to pick up Frank again and take him to Yorkshire for a pleasant holiday devoted to the re-establishment of the boy's nervous system. For the case would get into the papers, and Frank would have questions to answer to his people.

David never bothered about his own parents, for they could neither help nor harm him. The latter would be their desire, he felt sure. But the Champions' absence was vital, for the whole point of his plan lay in the complete obscurity of Frank. If the police did not get hold of Frank, David himself was perfectly safe, for they could prove nothing—whatever they suspected. The only evidence they would have would be David's visit to the suite during the afternoon, and the young man hoped that half an hour at least would elapse before the discovery of the crime, which in the first

place would render an estimate of the precise moment of the murder exceedingly doubtful, and in the second place would allow him time to reassure and dispose of Frank.

David's visit to the hotel would be strong circumstantial evidence ; but what importance it possessed would surely be mitigated when it came out that the young man, in the course of telephoning earlier in the afternoon to find out if his uncle and aunt were in the hotel, had mentioned to the clerk that he would drop in later to see if they had returned. It would all seem very natural and innocent. Failure lay in the discovery of Frank, and David trusted that the police would not delve too deeply into the manner of his life. Thus, they would never find out anything about Frank, and if they did not find Frank, certainly they would never find out anything about the murder. Anyway, if they did inquire into his affairs, it was quite doubtful if they would take the trouble to investigate his friends.

No, said David to himself, the idea is sound. There's only one thing which'll upset the apple-cart, and that's some absurd carelessness somewhere or other. "The human touch," he muttered, and chuckled. And he was right.

A cloud darkened the sun, and everything was oddly gloomy again. Everything was saying "Constance" and "Death" now, twice as loudly—birds, the sea, and the wind. But David, being a strong young man, knew that all this kind of thing was manufactured on the spot by lack of sleep and an overtired brain. He had a profound contempt for the man who permitted his nervous system to weaken his grip upon affairs.

David stood up squarely on the edge of the cliff, and looked all round him, at the sea before him and the land behind, and all the time he smiled gently, defying

anything on earth, or above the earth, or below the earth, to change his purpose. The sun shone out again.

"No, Constance will have to die—and so young," said David brazenly to the empty air, and lighted a cigarette. The man may have had a qualm or two that morning; but he gave no further sign of it.

The earth wavered beneath his feet, and then, as David flung himself backwards, the whole section upon which he had been standing slithered unpleasantly down to the rocks below.

"Damn!" said David, picking up his cigarette. He surveyed the ugly break in the grassy edge, where little runlets of sand and pebbles were still leaping merrily off into space. "Chance, you know—chance!" he grinned. "And there are many fools who'd say it wasn't."

He strolled home, whistling cheerfully, to a cold plunge and an unconscionable amount of breakfast.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DAVID'S sitting-room in Ebury Street was long and low and snug, with a comfortable taste in arm-chairs and ash-trays and reading-lamps. The walls were painted dark green, and were bare except for two or three old prints, and many books, which lined perfectly the far end of the room. These were rather decorative and pleasant to the eye. The windows, three of them, were broad and low, too, and small-paned. Frank thought it a delightful room, and so it was.

It was Tuesday evening. David had returned from Brighton that afternoon, and Frank, who now divided his time pretty evenly between St. George's Square and Ebury Street, was sitting on the small of his back in the second most comfortable arm-chair, and recounting with placid pride his successes at the Russe.

"It was as easy as falling off a log, Holt," he finished. "I wished you had been there, and then we could have done the thing in style."

"Good," said David. "It's not so easy, though, Champion, my friend. I suppose it was never suggested to your lightning brain that my uncle might keep the papers in the hotel safe?"

"By—Jove! I never thought of that!" cried Frank. "I say, Holt, then we can't get them, can we?" He was rather dashed.

"You're so final, Frankie," complained David, with a grin. "It's only a complication, you know. It's a devil of a bore, though."

He stopped and mused, while Frank awaited a solution with calm certainty.

"I only found out about it this week-end," David continued, nodding his head. "You see, Frank, it means that there may be somebody in the Baron's suite when we go after them. For they don't leave 'em about, as you can imagine, and somebody's got to bring 'em up from the hotel safe and take them down again."

"I don't see why they should ever be up there!" remarked Frank, brightly.

"Oh, dammit, I'll see to it that they are," replied David. "That's my business. I'm leaving you most of the heavy work, you know, Frank, my friend!"

"Good," said Frank, and met David's friendly grin with a blush.

"Now," Holt went on. "I'll arrange to have 'em up in the suite at a certain time, all right, but I can't be sure that there'll be nobody in the place. I don't imagine anyone will be there, but supposing there is, Frankie! Tackle that problem!"

"We'll have to try some other time," answered the lad, after deep thought.

David frowned. "Another time may not be possible," he said. "And they haven't been so particularly decent to us that we need consider them much. There'll only be one person there, if there's anybody."

"We must do him in," stated Frank, valiantly.

"Two against one is rather rotten," mused David, handling the lad delicately.

"But the papers are more important, Holt," Frank warned him, accepting the rôle of director. "We must get them, you know."

"You're right." David spoke seriously. "You're rather useful sometimes." He watched the boy wriggle with pleasure, and was silent for a time.

"This is going to be successful," David said, suddenly.

"I'm going to manage this without a mistake." He looked earnestly at the boy, and fixed his attention. "No matter what trouble we have to go through, no matter what difficulties we run up against, we've got to run this thing without a single slip. Will you be patient, Frank, and see it through? It's going to be soon now."

"Of course, Holt—you know!" replied the lad, awkwardly.

"Then," said David, getting up and pacing the room, "there's no time like the present."

"I'm going to drill you, Champion," he announced, looking critically at the room, "and myself, too, so don't mind," he added. "You've got to imagine that this is the room in the Baron's suite—and here are the papers." David shoved some documents from his desk into a leather case, and put it on the table. Frank watched him, thrilled to the marrow. "There's not a soul in the place," David assured him. "Jimmy's taken his missus to the Palace and won't be back for a couple of hours. Here are the papers," he repeated.

"Now, outside, Frank," he commanded. "Go down to the front door—stay inside the house, of course—and come up"—he glanced at his watch—"at exactly five minutes to nine. This is the hotel, you know."

Frank disappeared downstairs, silent and rather awed, with his eyes on his watch.

David thought for a moment, and then went to an old chest in his tiny hallway and found a large piece of brown paper and some string, which he put carefully in his pocket. Then he put on his hat, took his stick and gloves, shut the sitting-room door, and waited for Frank in the hall.

Champion arrived, treading delicately, at five and a half minutes to nine.

"Go down again, Frank," ordered David, easily, "and come up perfectly naturally. You don't want to creep about the Russe, or they'll jump on you."

"Of course," whispered Frank, "I'm a fool." He descended and ascended once more, this time behaving more or less normally.

"We're in the hotel corridor," said David. "Red carpet—just outside No. 327. You meet me here, you see."

Frank nodded.

"There's nobody in the suite," continued Holt. "So we open the door"—he opened it—"and go straight in and to the table where we find the papers. I'll wrap them up in this paper"—all the time he suited the action to the words—"and we walk out again. We separate at once, and you go out by the back way, carrying the parcel, and meet me outside on the Embankment at ten minutes past nine. Go!"

Frank automatically took the parcel and departed. David stopped him at the front door, or heaven knows where he would have gone.

"Good," he shouted. "Did it seem all right?"

"Seems simple enough," replied young Champion, blinking. Things seemed unreal to him, suddenly. David instilled a tremendous amount of purpose into these rehearsals.

"Now we'll try it again," David continued. "Bring back the papers, Frankie."

They put the case on the table again, and Frank departed to the front door. "At nine o'clock exactly," said David. Now he became very busy. From the chest he produced a coal-hammer, and from a cupboard on the landing an ancient dressmaker's model, stuffed and hard as a rock, on a wire frame—the landlord's lady had been a dressmaker in her youth—and placed

it beside the table in the sitting-room, near the case. He put the brown paper and string in his side pocket, and threw his rain-coat over his arm to conceal it.

Nine o'clock struck on the hall clock and Frank joined him.

"Three-two-seven!" said David quietly, pointing to the sitting-room door.

The boy nodded again silently.

"Somebody inside," said David, grimly, and looked into Frank's eyes. For a moment the boy's gentle, rather scared blue eyes were held by David's black stare. He put the hammer into the lad's hand.

"We open the door," whispered David, strangely and compellingly, still staring into Frank's face, "and walk in." They did so. "Somebody standing there—walk up and hit—hard!" ordered David, standing by the door. The model fell over on to the floor with a creaking of its wire bones, and Frank dropped the hammer and looked wildly round him.

"So!" said David, steadily. "Watch me wrap up the case." He did so. "Come, Frank!" he ordered. He put the package into the boy's hands, and they left the room, David shutting the door carefully. "Go out the back way and meet me on the Embankment in exactly ten minutes," said David. "Go on." The lad walked away, and David watched him curiously as he descended the stairs. He nodded his head once or twice.

"Nice work, Frankie," he shouted. Frank did not answer, and David, from the top of the stairs, saw him leaning against the front door, gasping like a fish, with the parcel at his feet.

"H'm!" grunted David. "All right, Frank, come on up."

"Makes me feel damn queer, Holt," said Frank. "Frightfully silly. I feel as if I'd been hit with the hammer."

David hauled him to the sitting-room, and sat him down to recover.

"You know, Holt, you'll kill him if you hit him like that with the hammer," remarked Frank, in a minute. That was the only objection he made. I think Frank never connected the action with real life.

Queer way of putting it, thought David, and wondered exactly how much effect he had upon the boy. "Good thing too," he replied, and Frank laughed. "Only we shan't hit him with the hammer," David added, and chuckled with him, for he was pleased, and had made his point.

"It's a genial instrument," Frank remarked, contemplatively.

They went through it again after a while, and then again, until the model was pounded out of shape. David relaxed for these occasions, however, and made no strain of the matter. Time after time he drove Frank up and down between the front door and the table, until the boy's arm ached and he cried for peace. But David noticed that he was falling into excellent form. The doorway, three steps and the blow, delivered with all his strength—Frank did not vary his style. It became mechanical.

David nodded approvingly and called a halt, removing all traces of the rehearsal while the boy rested.

"Don't suppose it'll be necessary a bit, Frank, but we can't risk anything, you and I."

And Frank agreed. Later they went for a stroll together in the cool night, and David made such an amusing fool of himself that Frank was weak with laughter when they arrived at St. George's Square.

"See you to-morrow, Frankie," cried David, and departed.

"So long, Holt," replied the boy.

From his bedroom window Frank listened to his retreating footsteps and sighed. "Damn good fellow, Holt," he murmured, and yawned.

CHAPTER XIX.

DAVID went to see Constance the next afternoon, and spent three-quarters of an hour very pleasantly with her. He didn't take her out, of course, but unaccountably the matter of the jewels cropped up again, and when he left the girl found herself pledged to wear something pretty round her neck the very next time he should come to see her. She had promised that on Sunday, but now it was assured. She was to have the case up in the suite on Saturday afternoon, provided her master and mistress were away, and David was to come and pick out the prettiest things for her to wear. He thrilled her with his own pretended anticipations; Saturday was to be a perfectly splendid day. Poor woman, it was her murder that he planned. She did not mind now about the jewels; her scruples were gone, dissipated, in her anxiety to please her man. Constance knew that David would not take her out to tea anywhere, unless the Baron and Baroness were well out of the vicinity, and she was so used to dealing with the jewel-case that she was quite certain of handling the affair without discovery. It is only fair to Constance to state that it was not discovery she dreaded. It was the principle of the thing at which she balked, and David's gentle friction had rapidly worn away her scruples.

The young man sauntered home, well pleased, and met young Champion wandering disconsolately down Ebury Street.

"Hello, Frank!" cried David. "What's amiss?"

"Nothing," replied the youth, morosely. "I thought you weren't coming in."

"Return with me, my friend, and we'll discuss affairs of great moment. Sorry I missed you."

"Doesn't matter a bit, Holt, only you said last night you'd see me to-day. I was rather late in coming round and I was afraid you'd got tired of waiting and gone out."

"Devil of a lot of arranging to be done in this stunt of ours," apologized David.

"I know. Of course." They reached David's rooms, and sat for a time in silence. Frank quite approved of David's cigarettes, and David himself chose a pipe, which he smoked rarely.

"There was something I wanted to say to you, Frankie," he announced in a minute.

Frank was all ears.

"Oh, yes," continued David. "It's about your clothes."

"My clothes!" cried the boy.

"Shut up. Yes. Look here, haven't you got an old black coat and a pair of grey trousers? A tail coat'll do. You know, the infernal garments they make you wear on state occasions in your last year at school."

"Yes, I've got them here," said Frankie, gloomily. "I say, Holt, you don't want me to wear them?"

"Bear up, Frankie," comforted his friend. "Only once or twice. Twice at most. It's rather sporting, really." David frowned at the lad's pained countenance and dropped his bantering method.

"Listen," he said, rather sternly. "I mean a disguise. This is not just fooling. I'm going to explain the whole plan to you again."

"Yes. Sorry, Holt!" murmured Frank.

"You know that I'm going to tell you one day—one

day quite soon, Frank—to be on the Embankment at a certain time."

"Yes," said Frank.

"All right. Be quiet until I finish. You wait there until I join you, and then I shall tell you that the hour has struck and that you're to go into the Russe by the back way and meet me at No. 327. There we'll collect the papers"—he grinned at Frank, who smiled back—"and potter off again. You'll take the parcel and return to the same spot on the Embankment, leaving the hotel by the back way, and wait until I come to you again and tell you to push off home."

"I know," remarked Frank.

"Yes. Now, there's a chance some one may speak to you going in by that side entrance, or when you come out with the papers, and the whole point of the game is that your part is absolutely unnoticed and unsuspected. Don't you see?"

"Yes, I think I do," answered the lad, who began to realize the simple glory of David's method.

"So," continued David, "you'll wear your ghastly coat and trousers, and a stand-up collar and a made-up tie tied in a bow, and a bowler hat. And you'll carry a parcel under your arm when you go in, and another when you come out, and you'll look rather like a valet, and rather like a man returning a suit of clothes that has been sent out of the hotel to be pressed." Here he paused for breath, and then repeated it all for Frank's benefit. "That's what you will be doing, if anyone should ask you, Frank," he added. "It'll be the wrong shape, but that won't matter. In fact you'll look extremely dull, and quite beneath notice. And really you'll be playing the star turn in the whole thing, and I'll be second fiddle."

The boy grinned at this, and really he did not mind

the clothes so much, now that he knew they were a disguise.

"After our game's pulled off, Frankie, I'll meet you again on the Embankment, and then you can go home and take off those garments at once and ditch 'em for ever. Can't think why you had 'em here, but I'm very glad you did. Couldn't be better."

"Mother packed them," explained Frank, blushing. "She thought I might want to wear them to a dance or something."

"God forbid!" said David, piously.

"What'll we do before dinner, Frank?" he said, in a minute. "Let's go out—suggest something!"

"Let's walk up to the Cathedral and hear the singing?" suggested Frank, who had been taken there by David in his week of seeing London.

"We will," said David.

They went through Victoria Station and towards the Cathedral, going out of their way to cross the unprepossessing district which lies between Victoria Street and the river. Frank loved these quiet evening walks with David better than anything he had experienced in town. But when the tall campanile loomed before them David spoke gently to the lad at his side.

"Don't let it make you think too much of that rotten affair of yours with the girl, Frank," he murmured, touching the boy's shoulder. "We'll forget it—if we can."

"What d'you mean, Holt—d'you mean that night?" asked Frank, in a frightened manner. He had not been thinking of it at all, of course, but now the whole business came back to him, and with it a great wave of depression.

"Yes. I know churches make you think of all the beastly things you've done," David said, awkwardly.

The boy hesitated and stopped for a moment, but the older man pulled him on. "Come on, Frank," he said.

Frank hesitated again on the threshold, as if he feared that the walls would fall in upon him for the wickedness of his entry into a holy place. Wretchedly he stumbled in, and wretchedly he knelt down in the mighty nave, clinging to the back of the chair before him, and muttering his plea for forgiveness over and over again.

Then the smell of incense stole down the church and soothed him, and the distant singing sounded like waves breaking on Heaven's own shore. The priest's voice rang in his ears, strident and strong, challenging Evil, and the mighty response swept him, grovelling, to the feet of God. Now he felt as if for ages of time he had lain face downward, arms outstretched and pleading, on the stone pavement before the altar, while the waves of music beat upon him, and the priest's voice, merciless, just, confident, dominated a world in which he had no part, from which he was an outcast. He pleaded for foothold in the world of men, only a foothold. And it came to him that David Holt, his friend, was standing near and proffering the means of atonement. He prayed for strength to grasp it, and then the anthem came, and Frank, suddenly knowing his way, blinked on the threshold of glorious Heaven, while the gates rolled back for his admittance.

David took him out at the end of the anthem, feeling that the boy had had enough. Frank did not want to go home, and David had something to say, and knew, being perfectly sympathetic, that the time was not yet.

So they strolled up Victoria Street to Whitehall, very silent indeed, and then through Trafalgar Square to the Mall, intending to reach Hyde Park and return to Ebury Street from the west.

Frank took some time to get over his emotional

crisis, though usually he was as quick to recover as he was to respond to influence. His mind was not the miserable chaos it had been when David sent him away from Ebury Street on the day following his lapse. Now he had a set task to perform for his own relief, and his thoughts never travelled further than the moment when all should be accomplished, and Holt would be shaking his hand and gratefully acknowledging the part he had played. There was a tacit assurance between them that the task, successfully carried out, should wipe out the past. So Frank did not remain miserable for very long. On the homeward way he asked Holt for a cigarette, and David considered his remarks.

"Law is a curious thing, Frank," he said, thoughtfully. "The worst of it is that it so frequently protects the evil-doer."

Frank took his time to consider this rather trite wisdom and then murmured agreement.

"It falls so short occasionally," continued David, speaking very slowly. "Here's this matter of ours. Look what has already happened in the case. My mother is dead, and my people damn nigh ruined. And now worse things threaten—disgrace and suicide for my father, and disgrace and ruin for so many very decent people, who really haven't done any harm. Yet no process of law can save them from it all."

Frank muttered in sympathy.

"Nothing," said David. "Nothing can come between them and ruin but—but what, Frank? But the two of us!" he continued quickly, answering his own question. "And we go against the law, you and I, to save them." He laughed rather bitterly. "By Gad, Champion," he cried, "it seems as if it were the right thing to do; the only thing to do."

Frank had forgotten his own troubles long since.

"I—I can't tell you, Holt," he said, awkwardly, "how —how much I think so!"

"It seems," repeated David, unheeding, "as if we had a kind of mission, a call, to do this and to save them. Champion, it can't be wrong!"

This chimed so happily with Frank's state of mind, that he burst into incoherent assurances of his devotion.

"And you must remember, Holt," he finished, "that sometimes the law has to be taken into one's own hands" —Frank liked this expression, and mouthed it nobly— "and anyway we know it's the right thing to do."

"You're right, Frank. Thank you. You're quite a good fellow," said David, quietly, and did not speak again until they got back to his rooms.

Frank loved and venerated David always, but now his feelings were stronger and deeper. "Just like old Holt," he thought, "to do all this and to take all the risk and be so decent to me after what I did." But really it wasn't a bit like Holt. At that time, you see, Frank never thought of personal risk. David was his strong buckler, and shielded him from the world so effectually that Frank never thought of the world. He never considered the judgment of the world. Reward was of David, and punishment was of David, and always it was a matter between himself and David.

After dinner they talked of the country, and David proposed a walking tour, with rather more riding than walking, in Yorkshire, to take place immediately after the plan had been brought to a successful consummation.

"We'll get up on the moors, Frank," said David, "and forget all our worries. We'll forget everything, Frank," he added, and nodded pleasantly, telling the lad plainly that everything should be forgotten, including Frank's crime against society.

The plan pleased the boy mightily; so much so that

the older man hinted at possible pitfalls in the way, for he did not wish the project to fill Frank's brain to the exclusion of everything else. They fell to talking of Frank's home, and its general nicenesses. The boy, being very young, favoured rooms in town as a permanent residence, but David laughed at him, and sketched for him the country house of his intention. For a time they were happy in adding improvements, and making a few necessary and Micawberish alterations. But David's smoothly-running plan was never absent from his mind for long.

"I'm going to give you a test, Frank, my friend," he announced. Frank was rather scared. He hated tests—remembered 'em at school.

"Look here," said David. "On Friday morning—hold on, though, I'll find out if Jimmy's going to be away that day. It's about due for his jaunt to Putney."

He went out through the hall and shouted lustily over the banisters.

"Jimmy!"

Frank, in the sitting-room, heard a trampling on remote stairs and a respectful voice.

"Sir!"

"Jimmy," said David, "will you get out my evening clothes Friday morning and look after them—press them or something? I'll want them Friday night."

"Sorry, sir," replied Jimmy, from the depths. "The missus and me have arranged to go to Putney Friday morning to see her folks. You know, Mr. Holt, you said——"

"Of course. That's all right. I forgot."

"Will to-morrow night do, sir?" asked Jimmy.

"Quite well. Any time," responded David. "And I hope you'll find them all very well. I mean your people!"

"Thank you, Mr. Holt."

"That's all, thanks," cried David, and returned to Frank.

"Thank you, sir," Jimmy departed below.

"So that's that," remarked David, shutting the sitting-room door. He plunged into his subject. "Here are your instructions, Frankie, very simple. On Friday morning you will wake up at your place, and you'll regard these rooms as the Hôtel Russe. D'you understand?"

"Yes," said Frank, vaguely.

"After breakfast you'll clothe yourself in your dud garments that we've mentioned, and you'll be here at five minutes to eleven, prepared to capture the papers. They'll be here—you know—on the table." He pointed to the leather case.

"Oh, I understand," said Frank.

"I'll be in the hall outside waiting for you at five minutes to eleven, and we'll go through everything properly. If I'm not in the hall it's all off and you go home again and change your clothes. D'you understand? It's good practice."

"Of course, I see," announced Frank. "A full dress rehearsal—rather genial."

"That's it," replied David. "After this we don't refer to it, you understand. And you won't see me to-morrow, or again—until five minutes to eleven, Friday morning, in the hall here."

"All right, Holt," said Frank, gloomily.

"That's all. No—don't write it down." David watched the boy twisting his face in the effort to impress the hour on his memory, and grinned at him pleasantly.

"Of course you'll remember it!" he said. "Now push off, Frankie. I'm tired, and I'll bet you are."

Frank yawned. "I am, Holt," he admitted, and

collected his hat obediently. "Damn dull to-morrow," he complained from the hall.

"You can see that all your disguise is ready," said David, stretching himself like a cat. "Better buy one of those black ties. Use your brains over it, Frankie. Oh, you'll find something to do!"

The boy murmured, and was gone. David went to bed. He slept well after a very satisfactory day.

CHAPTER XX.

"DAVY, I never see you now," Sophie wailed, stamping on the pavement.

"I don't know why you don't, my dear," answered the young man, "considering how I'm always wanting to see you. What shall we do about it?"

"You used to know what do to about it," she said, pouting.

David laughed. "Sophie, you're charming!" he announced. "Come to lunch with me to-morrow."

"I've a good mind not to," she replied, but the young man only continued to chuckle.

"Come to lunch with me to-morrow, Sophie darling," he implored. "Prettiest girl, come to lunch with me!"

"You know I will," she complained.

"Of course I know you will, and of course you know I want you to come. I've missed you, my dear, and I'm not going to miss you again. We'll go out a lot together now, like we used to, that is, if you'll have pity upon a poor lonely young man. I'm so glad I met you."

David rather spoilt the effect of this by his cheerful grin, but the girl forgave his past delinquencies in the pleasant promise of the future, as he knew she would, and promised to lunch with him the next day. They parted good friends, and David strolled on towards the Russe and his aunt and tea. He had previously telephoned to make certain that she was in. He wanted to see Constance, too, for he did not wish her to slip,

through negligence of his own, from her present high pitch of devotion.

Constance was in her mistress' bedroom, pretending to be busily employed with her mistress' dresses. Thursday to-day, thought Constance, scrutinizing an invisible fragment of lace, Friday to-morrow, and then Saturday—and Mr. David comes. Mr. David was coming, and death with him, but Constance was far too sensible to possess forebodings. She thrilled and smiled foolishly, and Mary Bennet, her friend, watched her sympathetically and knew she was thinking of her young man.

"Does he make up to you much, Constance?" she asked.

"No," said Constance, pained. "The idea!"

"I bet he does," replied the girl. "You're not so mighty pretty, Constance, but you've got something about you that I wish I had." She sighed,-and thought of her earnest young soldier.

"I'm older than you are," Constance said, in the manner of an elder sister explaining her special privileges to the younger set.

"It's not that," stated Mary, with sad certainty. "It's something in you, I expect. I should like to see him." She was very interested in this mysterious lover of Constance, whom she had never seen. Constance had told her nothing, beyond the bare suggestion that a young man was interested in her, but Mary had an excellent imagination.

"Is he coming Saturday?" asked the girl.

"Oh, I don't know," said Constance, carelessly. But that kind of thing was no good with Mary, who laughed wisely. "You can't be about here, you know," Constance added hurriedly. "Don't come here or he'll be angry."

"I believe he's as fat as your old Baron," remarked Mary, with spite, "and you don't want me to see him. When's he coming, Constance—five o'clock?"

"No!" said Constance.

"Half-past four—he'll come to take you out, I expect?"

"I dare say he won't come at all on any day," said Constance, with heightened colour. "Of course I'm not going out with him!"

"He'll come if your folks go off to Brighton again, as they said," remarked Mary, shrewdly. She took a great interest in every movement of the household.

"I don't know, and don't bother me." Constance was a little short with her friend. "Anyway they won't go to Brighton till late Saturday, for the Baron has a meeting Saturday afternoon, and madame is going to a matinée with another lady. So nothing will happen."

"I bet something does," said Mary.

Constance blushed and said nothing.

"I shall come round at five o'clock and surprise you both," teased her friend. As a matter of fact, she did come round, but it was not Constance who was surprised. Constance had had her surprise then, and would never be surprised again on this earth.

"Don't you dare!" cried Constance, really angry, and then the Baroness came in from the sitting-room and Mary discreetly faded away.

"Who is that girl, Constance?" asked her mistress, and continued without waiting for an answer. "Mr. David is coming to tea this afternoon. We shall have it in the sitting-room."

"Yes, madame."

"Oh, and we shall go down to Brighton again on Saturday by the late train. It did the Baron so much good," continued the Baroness.

"Yes, madame."

"Mr. David has promised to join us there on Sunday morning. I do wonder about that so charming dog," she added.

Constance, knowing nothing of any dog, made no reply, and her mistress explained at length the circumstances of its loss. "David did not help at all," she added, sadly. "He only laughed!"

"Oh, madame!" said Constance.

"Yes, Constance—only laughed! But I hope it will be all right," she said, vaguely, and forgot the matter.

"My Rosalie!" The Baron insisted fussily upon her immediate presence, and she fled to him, for they were going out together. The Baron was on his way to one of his mysterious business meetings, and his wife accompanied him for her health's sake, but intended to return at once to meet David. Constance, standing by efficiently with gloves, letters, and so on, got them away with the normal amount of fuss, and then proceeded to make the necessary arrangements for tea. She had just finished when David tapped lightly at the sitting-room door, and entered.

"Hullo!" he said, and advanced towards her.

Constance's ears, of course, had been aching for the sound of his voice ever since she had heard of his imminent arrival, but now she was all confusion, like the most unsophisticated maid of seventeen with her first lover. Following her invariable practice when she was confused, the woman retreated behind her primmest barrier. She could always hide herself behind routine and custom.

"Good afternoon, Mr. David," she murmured, retreating a little as he advanced.

"Constance, will you never stop being a coquette!" he cried, and took her into his arms. "You know

you're glad to see me, Constance," he said, kissing her between words. "Then why don't you say, 'Hurrah, David!' when you see me, instead of 'Good afternoon, Mr. David!'" He imitated her sedate little tone.

"I don't know what to say when I see you—David," she whispered.

He made gentle love to her until business was necessary, for he feared the return of the Baroness before he had found out what he wanted. Constance had explained the absence of her mistress.

"How about Saturday, my dear?" he asked. "Is it all right?"

"Yes," she told him, "but not quite all right. They'll be out in the afternoon, but they'll come in again at half-past six, and catch the 7.45 train to Brighton."

She explained the errands of her employers on the Saturday afternoon, and then hesitated, fearing that the young man would decide to postpone their outing.

"What an uncomfortable business!" remarked David, thoughtfully.

"They will have dinner in the train," said Constance.

"That dinner won't suit my uncle," David chuckled.

"He will arrange for late dinner at the hotel, too," said Constance, wisely. "At Brighton. He has done that before."

"My wise old uncle gets two dinners—what," David laughed loudly, but he was revolving the matter in his mind.

"I'm afraid it's a wash-out for us, Constance," he said. "Don't give us long enough. Only two hours together." David cursed to himself. It seemed as if he would have to postpone the whole thing.

But two hours seemed a lifetime to the girl. She had feared this, and her heart sank. And they were

leaving London so soon. Greatly daring, she caught his arm and begged him to take her after all. "Do—David," she said, imploring.

"It's you, Constance, I'm thinking of," said David. "Look here, don't you see that you'll have to change back into your ordinary clothes before they get back, and deal with the jewel case, too. You won't have time, you know."

"If we went out soon after four," she pointed out, "we should have lots of time. They won't be in till seven, I know. And it will be all right about the case, because I shall have to bring it up for madame to choose something to take to Brighton. We could do it, David," she begged him. "I do want to," she pleaded. It was the first time Constance had ever stated a desire of her own to him, but I fear that was not the reason which made him give way.

"If it's all right for you, Constance," he replied. "I should love it."

He pondered over the plan. It did not matter to him where his uncle and aunt went, Brighton or Liverpool, provided they were definitely absent from the hotel for a given space of time. And he perceived advantages, too. He surmised shrewdly that there would be no difficulty about Constance obtaining possession of the jewel case from the hotel safe in the ordinary course of events, but that the hotel people might think twice about letting her have it when they knew her employers were out of town. He perceived the flaw in his previous plan and chuckled. The gods were beckoning him to success.

"Will it please you, Constance, then," he asked, "to risk it? We shall only have a short time together."

"Yes," she cried, joyfully. "Perhaps we shan't

have another chance." She thought of life in Paris, without David, and her heart failed her.

"Good old Constance!" he exclaimed, pleased; and then he heard a step in the corridor. Constance, with her crumpled apron, only got to the bedroom just in time. The Baroness came in, panting.

David greeted his aunt in his usual affectionate manner, and then a slave of the hotel brought in tea. Constance appeared to manage its disposal, as sedate as ever; her rapid changes of manner always gave David delight. But the Baroness was talking busily. She was delighted to be going back to Paris, she assured David, as happy as a holiday-child over leaving London.

"Dino says perhaps the end of next week," she announced, telling David of her efforts to persuade her husband to expedite their departure. "It is not much, but it is too much, yes." She nodded her head emphatically, referring to the delay.

"I don't think that's very nice of you, Aunt Rosalie," remarked David, with pathos. "We shall never see each other again, then, you know."

"Ah, we have a plan!" said the Baroness, wagging her forefinger and leaning confidentially across the tea-table. "I will whisper it, my David. It is that your uncle wants a secretary of confidence." She paused for effect, and then, as David was speechless, she added, "It is to be settled at Brighton when you come. Now!"

"By Jove, Aunt Rosalie——"

For a moment the fate of Constance hung in the balance. Confidential secretary—what opportunities would arise! It is to be noted that David's original intention of stealing his uncle's jewels was not in the least hampered by the suggestion. Then he decided. Everything was ready, or just about to be—he would

not permit these diversions. How much easier it all would have been, he thought ruefully, if he had been confidential secretary to his uncle all this time.

"By Jove, Aunt Rosalie," he repeated, "you people are awfully kind. You really are. But I shall have to think about this, you know."

"Yes, you must think, my David," replied his aunt. "And you must not forget to be surprised when your uncle talks of it to you, for I—I should not have told you." She laid her finger on her lips to enjoin secrecy. "But I could not help telling you, my little David," she remarked, with comfortable resignation.

"Of course not, Aunt Rosalie. I expect it was you who suggested the whole thing," replied David, looking gratefully across the table.

"No, no," insisted his aunt. "It was your uncle. He thinks you clever, David, and me—I am sure!"

What nice people, thought the young man—almost a pity to rob them. He chuckled inwardly.

"Not a bit, my dear aunt," David denied, but he was thinking of something else. This business of being secretary intrigued him rather. Gad, what a chance he would have had, he thought. And yet, suspicion would have been more pointed. Perhaps it was better as it was—anyway it was all settled. Well, it was another plank in the platform of safety he was building for himself. He decided that the offer should somehow be made public at the inquiry. It added a little more to the glamour of improbability which he hoped would surround his participation in the crime. Any suspicious policeman would consider that he would have accepted the position, bided his time, and made his own opportunity to steal the valuables.

So much for that. For half an hour he listened to his aunt's chatter, how she was going to have an

apartement in Paris, and live there with Constance and a couple of servants and drive every morning in the Champs Elysées. It was going to be delightful. No more hotels, she had decided; the Baron must fend for himself if he insisted. She threw up her beringed hands in a gesture of finality, and David got up to go.

"Oh, may I come to dinner to-morrow night, Aunt Rosalie?" he asked.

"But of course, my David!" she said. "Dino will be delighted."

"Just in case I can't come down to Brighton after all," he explained. He was really very anxious to be with them as much as possible before the theft, in case they discussed any prospective change in their plans for Saturday afternoon. And he could get the last word from Constance, too.

"But you must come, my David," she said, "and to dinner, too."

"I will," he replied, and kissed her, and went away.

CHAPTER XXI.

At twenty-one minutes to eleven Frank left his room in St. George's Square and stepped off briskly towards Ebury Street. The morning was cloudy, and he was glad to wear his raincoat, which, indeed, he had put on in his bedroom. He didn't want to appear in his odd dress before his landlady. The poor boy's sporting blood was not plentiful enough to swamp his hatred of appearing in the least abnormal. He shed his coat, according to David's orders, regretfully enough as he left the Square.

But against his own will Frank had been extraordinarily successful in his array. In his decently-cut clothes, smartly turned out with all the little fancies that the moment demanded, young Champion appeared as normal a young gentleman as he himself would have desired. And he had a peculiar freshness and smartness, and a certain delightful pleasure in himself, which drew a second glance from four girls out of five. Now, how completely had that air departed—how tragically gone!

Dressed in his worn, black tail coat, his rather tight grey trousers, his diabolically respectable collar, and his absurd little black bow tie, the whole capped by a bowler hat of the most smug, Frank was the complete negation of personality.

He sank directly into nothingness. The golden down, the sparse soft hairs about his callow chin, accentuated his nothingness, if that were possible. You could have watched him coming down the Belgrave Road for ten minutes—you could have stared at him as he passed

you—and a minute after you would have been perfectly unable to describe him. In fact, if anyone had asked you, probably you would have sworn that you hadn't met a soul in Belgrave Road that morning. It was amazing. Poor lad—David used every shred of feeling in the boy. Every tone and faculty, every quality and emotion, David practised them all in a short two months.

Now Frank walked up Ebury Street with his eyes fixed on his wrist watch. It was six minutes to eleven, and young Champion was thrilled with excitement. He was determined to please David this morning, to satisfy him, and dutifully he had almost convinced himself that he was walking towards the Hotel Russe. He pushed the street door open—it was five minutes to eleven—and he mounted the dingy stairs, feeling the red carpet of the Russe beneath his feet.

David stood in the hallway, dressed for outdoors, with his raincoat over his arm, and the boy's heart leapt with sheer excitement as he saw him.

"Good lad," murmured David, and touched the boy's shoulder with a friendly hand. It was at times like these that Frank knew how much he cared for the older man.

"She's inside," said David, quietly, and pressed the ghastly hammer into the boy's hand. Then he opened the door deliberately and entered, still with his hand on Frank's shoulder.

There was the table, and there were the papers, and above them the form of a woman.

"Frank!" said David sharply, and the boy, half blind, stepped forward and struck with all his force. The form lurched and fell over, Frank nearly falling on the top of it, and then David was there, with calm, quiet words.

"Good lad," he said again. "Watch me, Frank."

He produced brown paper and string and wrapped up the leather case, while Frank leant against the table for support. David's calm, unhurried action reassured him, but though he knew it was all make-believe he did not dare look at the tumbled heap of drapery upon the floor.

"Here, Frank," said David, smiling into the boy's eyes, and handed him the parcel. Champion took it, and David, with a quick glance round the room—for he was very much in earnest, too—gently propelled him outside, and shut the door after him as deliberately as he had opened it.

"Wait for me where the 'bus stops," ordered David, gesturing towards the point. The lad left him at once; he hadn't spoken at all. A church clock struck eleven as he left the house, and a minute later David came out, neat and undisturbed, and strolled leisurely in the opposite direction. All traces of the rehearsal had been removed. He permitted five or six minutes to pass before he joined Frank, though that was no part of his general plan. He was interested to note the effect of it all on the boy, for when it came to the real thing that would be his chief danger. There were two dangers, and only two, which disturbed David. One was the possibility of Frank's developing hysteria before he got home; the other was the risk of somebody coming in while the murder was being committed. He simply took a chance, of course, over the latter; the matter would only take four or five minutes, probably less, and the chance of interruption was very remote. As for Frank's nerves, he felt fairly certain that he could control them long enough for his purpose. If he couldn't, well, the fat was in the fire, and he shrugged his shoulders. David never considered himself infallible.

The possible gain was well worth the risk, at all times —that was his point of view. And, at any rate, Frank would be hanged—at least I hope so, poor little devil, thought David—and not he.

So David sauntered and considered, and in a minute or two he picked up Frank, rather white and stolid still, and took him home again and made much of him. Subtly he belittled the importance of the enterprise to the boy, chiefly by discussing matter-of-fact affairs and their common plans as if they were all just as important. Just as cleverly he removed the trace of horror which he divined in the boy's brain—an awful occasional flicker of horror, as if he had killed some one, Frank felt—and at the same time he made it very clear that he was most pleased with the boy's behaviour, that Frank had played up as David knew he would, and that things were very well between them. He discovered a vein of confidential friendliness for the boy that Frank had never suspected, and as David was Frank's life, as the day was only sunny when David was pleased, and gloomy as death despite the sun when David was displeased, the boy was happy in a very few minutes.

"I say, Holt," Frank implored after a time, "let me go home now and get out of these damn things. You don't know what it feels like." He screwed his neck in his miserable collar.

David laughed. "Of course, Champion," he said. "You're so good I haven't thought about you! Stand up and let's have a good look at you. By Gad, you're perfect, you know." His artistic eye was almost satisfied. Suddenly he snapped his fingers in the air.

"I have it, Champion," he cried. "The finishing touch—hold on a minute!"

He charged into his room and after much rummaging

at the bottom of a cupboard produced a pair of rather grimy cuffs. "Don't know who they belong to," he said, returning triumphantly, "unless it's Jimmy. They've been here years."

"They don't make much difference, Holt, do they?" asked Frank, applying them to his wrists.

"If you only knew, my friend," replied David, delighted. "Show about an inch of 'em."

He sent the boy home then, for he had many small threads to catch and connect before the next day. It is hard to believe that David appeared perfectly natural and happy on the day before the murder he had planned, but any casual observer would have said that the young man had not a worry in the world. He chuckled over the bombshell he was preparing for his little circle of acquaintances.

For two months he had lived an intent and circumscribed existence, dashing from Frank to the Baron, from the Baron to Constance, and so to Frank again, and now he cheerfully arranged the end. The Baron was to have his jewels stolen. Frank—solemn schoolboy—was to become a murderer; Constance was allotted an unpleasant death; only Sophie on the edge of the circle was to be left unharmed. Friendship with Holt was not a blessing.

David came downstairs with Frank and stopped him for a moment in the dim hall.

"You feel ready for all this, Champion?" he asked. "The clock is about to strike, you know." He grinned at the boy.

"No, really, Holt!" cried Frank. "When?"

"To-morrow, I think," answered David.

"Good Lord!" murmured the boy, rather awed, but pleasantly excited.

"D'you feel equal to it, my friend?"

"You bet I do, Holt," assured the youth. He paused a moment. "I say, Holt, I hate the idea of that hammer. It's pretty rotten, you know."

"Don't think about it, Frank," David said to him. "I don't suppose it'll be necessary for a moment. But you've got brains enough to know that we can't risk anything in all this. We've got to be prepared for anything—and we shall be."

"I know, Holt," replied Frank. "I've never thought about it much before, because I knew that, but—I don't know—somehow this morning it gave me cold shivers." He looked appealingly at the older man, who nodded, thoughtfully.

"I don't know, Holt, if—I couldn't do it if it was real——"

"Don't think about it, Frank," David interrupted. "Think of what I told you, think of why we're doing the whole thing. I'll tell you what to do when it comes to the point, and—you trust me, Frank, don't you?" He smiled into the boy's eyes. "I swear it'll be all right."

"Of course," whispered Frank, flushed and awkward. "Sorry, Holt!"

"Bless you, I know," remarked David. "Now get off, confound you, and come back to tea—I shall want you then."

"Ha!" cried Frank, pleased, and dashed off, his raincoat flapping in the breeze. Holt always understood, he thought.

Now David departed to keep his luncheon appointment with Sophie, and he found the girl charming, though a little boring when she pretended to resent his recent neglect of her. He did not permit this kind of thing, for he refused to be judged by common standards. Sophie, however, was much too afraid of him to press

her resentment too far, and she thawed graciously over a successful lunch.

"Come to tea with me to-morrow?" asked David, when they were parting.

"You don't deserve it," she said, her hand in his, "but I will. You're so attractive, Davy darling," she drawled.

"It'll have to be somewhere in the Strand," warned David. "Early, too—I shall be down there in the afternoon. I've got to go and see my uncle and aunt."

Sophie wrinkled her pretty nose in distaste. One doesn't have tea in the Strand! But she was too pleased to have him with her again to make any objections.

"I'd do anything for you, Davy," she said with resignation.

"Quarter past four, then," said David, and chose the least dreary tea shop he could think of. He left the girl in Piccadilly and strolled off homewards to meet Frank. This was a busy day.

Young Champion was at Ebury Street, looking bewilderingly smart, for his very soul revolted against his apparel of the morning, and he had taken hours to dress. David made no comment, which was one of the little reasons for the strength of Frank's affection.

"When are your people coming back, Frankie?" he asked. "They'll stay in Norway some time, won't they?"

"They only went off on Monday," replied the youth. "Only a week ago. They're somewhere up by the Hardanger Fiord now, wherever that is. Miles away!"

"Well away from newspapers," remarked David, cheerfully. "I think our stunt'll come off to-morrow all right, Frank, my lad."

"Good!" said Frank. "I say, Holt, it's rather exciting, isn't it?"

"Tell you the truth," David said, confidentially, "I can't work up any particular excitement over the business. It seems so natural and right—as if it couldn't help itself."

"Yes." Frank was eager to agree, for he felt a qualm or two over his weakness of the morning, and he feared to sink in David's esteem. In truth, he wasn't particularly excited, for David's casual manner forbade the idea.

"You know what you've got to do—how we're going to run it?" David considered that the ground could not be covered too often.

"After you've got home, Frank, with the papers, you'll wait until I come round and see you. You must try and behave perfectly normally, my friend, remember. To-morrow night you think over what I'm saying now. Be strong, Frank. It'll be your worst time, you know, thinking about it. Remember it's all part of the game."

"I'll remember, Holt," answered Frank, seriously.

"Try, Frank, anyway. You'll change your clothes and put the ones you've been wearing in your suit-case, with the papers. The real papers, Frank!" David cried, and banged him gently on the back. "Then you'll be ready to catch that train to Codnor. Send a post-card to-night to your caretaker to tell her you're coming down."

He changed his tone. "Don't open that parcel," he said, gently. "There are things there that I should not want even you to see."

Frank was deeply moved.

"I understand, Holt," he replied, and thought he did.

"Then you write a letter to your people, telling them

that my uncle has had a burglary or something at his his place and that I've been detained because I was the last person seen in his rooms, but that I'll be free again in a day or two, and that then you and I are going off for a walking tour in the country, to get it all out of our heads."

"I like that letter, Holt," remarked Frank, with a cheerful grin. David laughed too. He quite loved the boy when he talked like that.

"By Jove, I'm looking forward to that walking tour," said Frank.

"So am I. We'll go to Yorkshire. Tell your father and mother that everything's all right, and they're not to dream of cutting their holiday short and coming back to England. Tell 'em that you're quite all right and they can't do anything. They won't get the letter or any newspapers for a week at least, if they ever do, and we shall be away in Yorkshire then, having a damn good holiday, Frankie. The letter will keep 'em from losing their nerve. Better make a draft of it now, I think."

Frank swore that he would remember, but David insisted, and he sat down at the writing table and wrote laboriously the letter his friend dictated. David was careful over the matter of dates.

"An envelope and a stamp—on your right there," said David.

"That's all right," said David. "Now, my friend, here's something for you to remember." The boy looked worried, and David laughed at him. "If you don't hear from me by lunch-time, Monday, you'll go out and post that letter on Monday afternoon, do you see? It'll mean I've been detained for evidence or something, as we've said in the letter. Don't post it until the afternoon, anyway. You understand, Frank?"

He repeated the simple instructions until he was sure of the young man's perfect comprehension.

"By the way, Champion, you haven't any inquiring relatives about, have you? No interfering aunts and all that kind of thing?"

"No," replied the lad, after deep and somewhat unnatural consideration. "I've only got one aunt, and I've never seen her. She's much older than my mother."

"Good," said David. "One more thing, Frank, and this is a favour. You don't get a newspaper, do you, for yourself?"

"Lord, no!"

"Then promise me you won't look at one until we're away together. Will you, Frank?"

"I'm not a baby!" Frank expostulated.

"Promise me, there's a good fellow. I don't want to have you worried."

"Oh, I'll promise!" Frank assured him. "I don't care."

"That's all, then, Frank, my hero. Let's have tea."

They procured tea for themselves, for Jimmy and his lady were still wandering in the depths of Putney. For an hour they talked lazily, discussing their projected holiday in Yorkshire, to Frank's great pleasure, and then David stood up and stretched, and announced the urge of dressing for dinner.

"Walk with me as far as the hotel, Frank, will you?" he asked. "I want to point out the place where you must wait for me to-morrow."

"I'd love to, Holt," answered the boy. "I know the place, though——" for the other had explained all this.

"We'll go, anyway," David remarked. He changed his clothes leisurely, and after a while they set out. It was still early, and quite light. After a day of

submission to the clouds, the sun had at last asserted his authority, and was sinking benignantly from a clear sky. The golden light overspread the river, and Spring, terribly busy, seemed to rest for a moment and survey the results of a strenuous day. Frank, country-bred, adored the queer peacefulness.

When they reached the appointed spot, a minute's walk from the Russe, David explained the idea. He didn't want Frank to loiter obviously at a corner ; he thought shrewdly that the boy might behave oddly. Frank was to walk round the block of buildings, keeping the buildings on his left hand. David would come to join him and walk round the block with the buildings on his right hand. Thus they would meet with only a few seconds delay, and it would be less marked. This was all in case some hotel employee, wandering about so close to his working place, might see the two and recognize one of them. Frank was very pleased with this idea ; it seemed to him a stroke of genius.

"Come round to-morrow at lunch time—after lunch," said David, when everything was clear to the boy. "I'll have your instructions ready for you. But it may be all off, you know, so don't get excited."

They both laughed at the idea.

"So long, Frankie," said David. "Walk home—go to your church if you like—and go to bed early. I shall depend on you to-morrow." He smiled gaily and ran off towards the hotel.

Frank strolled home, sedate and happy.

The Baron and Baroness greeted their nephew with accustomed warmth. Constance was not in sight, but David intended to have a word with her before he left. He was early, and dinner was delayed, and David employed himself in finding out the exact movements of his uncle and aunt on the Saturday afternoon.

Constance had been perfectly correct, it appeared; they both had definite errands which would employ them for the whole afternoon, after which they were to meet and return to the hotel together. Allowing for delay, David would have settled his affairs at the suite by a quarter to five. Granted that everything would happen in a normal manner, and there was no reason to suppose anything else, they would return to the Russe not earlier than half-past six. Then they would collect the luggage prepared by Constance during their absence, and drive to Victoria in time for the 7.45 train for Brighton.

"Where we shall expect you to join us, my David," remarked the Baron warmly. "We have affairs to discuss, you and I." David grinned to himself; this was the secretaryship.

"You interest me, uncle!" he purred, and promised he would, at the earliest possible moment.

"If I can manage it," he said, "I shall come down with you by that train, uncle. If I do, I'll come round or telephone to the hotel here before you go."

"Good!" shouted his uncle, and the Baroness was very pleased too.

"Yes, come, my David," she said, "for your uncle will go in that horrible stuffy carriage and smoke cigars, and everybody will smoke cigars. But if you come, we will go away by ourselves and leave him in his smoke."

"Hurrah!" cried David. "It's a bargain, Aunt Rosalie." He turned to his uncle. "Probably you won't see us again until Monday, sir," he warned him.

"I'll trust you, David, but not my Rosalie," replied the Baron, wickedly, and was duly reproved.

David was impatient for the dinner to be finished, for he wished to talk to Constance and then to get away. He had all the information he required from his uncle

and aunt, but he must have a word with the woman standing sedately behind him in the gloom. One thing about his uncle's dinners, he thought, they were so long drawn out that precious little time was left for conversation afterwards. The Baroness stayed with them and smoked another cigarette, and it was half-past ten before the Baron suggested a move into the other room.

"By Jove, I must go, sir," said David. "Didn't know it was so late."

They pressed him warmly to stay, pleasant people that they were, but he insisted. Even then he stood for appreciable minutes at the sitting-room door, saying good-bye between cordially repeated appointments for the morrow. He shut the door on them at last, and immediately Constance appeared before him in the doorway of her room.

"Mr. David!" she said cautiously, her face white against the blackness behind her.

He kissed her soundly, but suddenly the woman bored him. Suddenly he was bored with all the care he had to take with her. Even now, after all this time, she called him 'Mr. David'! The feeling amused him as he repressed it.

"Clever old Constance!" he whispered in her ear, conveniently close. "I wanted to talk to you."

"I wanted to see you, too," she murmured, honestly.

"I can't stay," he said. "They'll be calling you. We'll have a joyous afternoon to-morrow, and I'll come and tell you what to wear. I shall decorate you, Constance."

She blushed in the dark. "Yes," she said, still in his arms, for they stood just inside her room, and were safely hidden.

"When are you going to get the case, then, Constance,

because I want to come early. We'll have all the time we can together."

"I shall get it at four o'clock, Mr.—" "No!"—"David," she said, half laughing, "and take it down again when we go out."

"That's better," said David. "All right then, I'll be here about a quarter to five, or a little before. Early as possible, my dear!" He kissed her again and went away, leaving her looking after him. As he turned the corner at the end of the passage, he looked back and saw her still staring after him.

"A woman to be relied on," said David to himself, imitating his uncle. "But for common or garden use —oh, Lord!" He was tired of Constance.

David went home and went to bed. He was very sleepy, but he forced himself to stay awake until he had gone over the plan in all its bearings and found no flaw. The charm of it to him lay in the fact that if anything went wrong he could drop the whole business at any stage, even in Constance's room with her death imminent, without the least unpleasant consequence.

"All set!" murmured David to himself, and grinned into the darkness, and went to sleep.

CHAPTER XXII.

"Is that the Russe?" said David. "This is Mr. David Holt speaking." Without turning from the telephone he beckoned to Frank to stop fluttering the pages of a magazine.

"Can you tell me, please, if the Baron or Baroness Giusti is in the hotel?" asked David.

Frank heard a long explanatory murmur in the receiver. David, from his frequent visits and messages, and being in himself a conspicuous young man, was well known in the hotel as the nephew of the rich Baron and Baroness on the third floor.

"Oh, I see!" said David. "Then I'll probably drop in this afternoon to see if they've come back. I want to see them. . . . yes, I know they're going away for the week-end . . . yes . . . . thanks very much." He hung up the receiver and turned to Frank.

"Most obliging young man," he announced. "Wanted to explain everything about their movements. He understood that I might roll in this afternoon, though, and that's all I wanted."

"Shouldn't think you'd want him to know that, Holt," remarked Frank, in a muffled tone. He had thrown all the cushions he could find into the biggest arm-chair, and was luxuriously at ease in the depths, with his feet on the back of David's chair.

"Atmosphere, Frankie, atmosphere!" replied David, but he refrained from attempting an explanation.

"Now, my young friend," he said, "we'll get to business. You push off to your place, change your

clothes—last time, Frank—and be walking round those buildings off the Embankment at twenty-five minutes past four. Not a moment later, my lad. It's three o'clock now."

"Just got comfortable," answered Frank, placidly, making no attempt to rise.

"Is your place quiet in the afternoons?" asked David. "I mean, will anybody see you going out dressed like that?"

"Silent as the tomb," Frank said, sepulchrally, and got on his feet with an effort. "I won't let anyone see me, Holt," he added with confidence.

"None of your infernal detective tactics," warned the older man. "Don't matter if they do see you really, only it's always best not to be seen. Here's your parcel."

He gave the lad a paper parcel, which had been lying on the table before him, a paste-board box wrapped up in brown paper, about nine inches wide and of similar depth, and a foot long. That was to hold the jewel case; he had discovered its approximate dimensions long ago from the puzzled Constance.

"What's that for?" gloomily asked the lad, who knew perfectly well.

"That's for you to carry to the hotel, and don't you forget it!" David told him. "Now push off and change!"

"Genial little box," said the boy, balancing it on his finger tips. "Nothing in it."

"There will be," remarked the other grimly. "You'll probably put your foot into it if you're not careful."

"Ha, a joke!" shouted Frank, and dashed for the door, dodging the book David hurled after him. But the older man caught him again in the hallway.

"This is serious now," he said, quietly, holding the boy by the shoulders and looking into his face. "Remember what you're doing, Frank, what we're both doing. It means a lot, you know."

"I know," replied Frank, dropping his frivolous mood on the instant. "I was only ragging. I'll do it properly, Holt."

"Yes, remember, Frank!" continued David, speaking very slowly and solemnly. "Just as you want to be free of the rotten things you've done, so do these people we're helping now."

"I know," repeated the boy, soberly. "It'll be all right—trust me, Holt."

"I do," said the other, and was silent a moment, with his hands still resting on the lad's shoulders. Then he changed his tone. "Now for it, then," he cried cheerfully. "Twenty-five minutes past four, you know where, with the parcel under your arm. And remember to have your gloves in your pocket. That's important. Your gloves. Now get on!"

Frank went away very quietly.

Now David turned to his own preparations. He unlocked a trunk in his bedroom cupboard, and took from the bottom of it a heavy sealed package. This he opened, and produced a coal hammer—the hammer which he had made Frank buy in Fetter Lane weeks ago. David had put it away carefully, to avoid mistaken zeal on the part of his landlord's servant. It was a devilish instrument, from a point of view of violence. The head was very heavy, with the striking surface rounded; David swung it in his hand and approved the weight. "Suitable for coals or heads," said David to himself, but his usual smile was lacking.

He wrapped the hammer in a couple of large handkerchiefs and then put the bundle into the pocket of

his raincoat, buttoning the flap securely. After that he turned the raincoat inside out, folded it, and threw it negligently over his arm. Then he went into his bedroom and critically surveyed the hang of it by means of his large mirror. It was quite satisfactory; the careless silk folds perfectly disguised the wrinkles caused by the weight in the pocket. He put it down again and stood for a moment, searching his brain for any tangled thread. But there was nothing more to do. David relaxed, and, sitting down in the big chair, read Frank's magazine.

The clock in the hall struck the half hour, and the man nodded, but did not stir at once. He lay back, and yawned, and stretched himself, and finally arose. Leisurely he collected his hat, his stick, his gloves—an unworn pair; he threw his rain-coat over his arm in studied negligence. "So!" he murmured, and glanced round the room, and went out.

Sophie entered the tea shop at twelve minutes past four. For some reason or other appointments made by David were always kept punctually. Sophie even thought nothing of being early—she was so accustomed to this; David had one good effect upon his friends, in that he so rapidly abolished absurd little shams and affectations between them and himself.

The girl meant to make something out of this meeting. She wanted passionately to get back to their old method of life, two months distant, when David had made much of her, danced with her, bullied her, ruled her, and on rare occasions permitted himself to be ruled. She had felt that they were drifting apart for a long time, ever since the night of the ball. She chose a small table in a discreet corner, and looked appraisingly about her. It was quite a nice little tea shop, not so dreary as she had imagined. David had chosen it because it was just

round the corner from the Russe; not a minute's stroll, in fact.

His cheerful grin lit up the whole place to the girl, when he came in two minutes later. They both looked rather odd there; they were so very smart and well turned out. The girl welcomed him shyly, for once, and David rallied her on her virginal airs. He put his raincoat cautiously on the chair beside him, and then they selected good things to eat, David's dark, smooth head very close to the golden curls beneath Sophie's ravishing little hat. He whispered all sorts of things into her ear, things which had nothing to do with cakes and buns and tea, until the sympathetic waitress gave up her hovering and departed haughtily, and for five minutes refused to recognize either Sophie's plaintive smile or David's crooked forefinger.

So the minutes passed, the young man marking them with care. At twenty-two minutes past four he showed small signs of disturbance, patted his breast pocket, felt in his raincoat, put his hands into his trouser pockets and jingled his keys. He looked worried and Sophie laughed at him. Finally he spoke.

"Dammit, Sophie!" he whispered. "I've come out without a penny—must have left that case of mine somewhere. What a bore!"

The girl was very pleased.

"Then you're having tea with me, Davy!" she cried. "I'm so glad." But his worried look checked her laughter.

"Look here, I shan't be five minutes, my dear," he said hurriedly. "I'll just dash round to the hotel and see if my aunt's there. Perhaps I left my case there last night, or anyway I can get some money from her. Shan't be a second, Sophie!"

"No—o, Davy!" cried the girl. "I've got heaps

of money." She dangled an absurd little chain purse before him.

"No, I've got to go round there to see my people, anyway, my dear," he said, reaching for his hat. With apparent forgetfulness of his imminent return he picked up his raincoat too. "Forgive me, my dear—it's only just past the quarter now—I'll be back in five minutes. I shan't be happy till I get the case."

He smiled at her apologetically and was gone. The devoted Sophie frowned a little, but only a little. She knew he would be very nice to her later on to atone for his present lack of courtesy. That was his way.

David walked quickly past the Russe and turned down the next side street towards the river. It was exactly twenty-six minutes past four when he met Frank, trudging manfully round the square of buildings with his parcel under his arm. David nearly passed him without recognition—his dress was excellently done—but Frank hailed him with joy. They walked down the quiet lane together. "Now's the time, Frank!" said David, with a queer smile on his lips.

"Good!" said the boy, stoutly.

"Go in straight now, by the back way I showed you," ordered David, "and straight to No. 327, third floor—you know it!" He grinned in a friendly way. "I'll meet you there," he added, "don't hurry!"

"All right," said Frank. He was excited, but he went off cheerfully and without haste.

David hurried, though. He made the best of his way to the main entrance of the hotel, and nodded easily to the commissionaire as he entered. There was no sign of hurry about him as he leant over the clerk's desk.

"Is my uncle—is the Baron upstairs, d'you know?"

he asked, with another friendly nod. He'd asked that question on several previous occasions.

"I—I'm not sure, Mr. Holt," replied the clerk, responding to David's charming smile. "I'll find out at once."

"No, don't bother," said David, "I'll go up." Then, as the clerk still moved his hand towards the telephone, he added: "Came out without any money!" with a confidential grin, as if appealing to another man's comprehension.

The clerk nodded sympathetically, and turned to another seeker after information. David disappeared in the crowd.

A man came out of a room on David's left hand as the young man walked down the long red-carpeted corridor, but he only saw David's receding back. Holt stood by the bathroom passage outside his uncle's suite and watched the fellow disappear in the distance. As he did so Frank came round a corner, gazed about him for a brief moment, a dramatic moment, and followed directly in David's footsteps.

David fumbled in his raincoat and shook the hammer free of its wrappings.

Holt had slipped on his gloves as he strolled down the corridor; he knew no more than the normal man of the science of finger print reading, but he took no risk possible to avoid. Frank came up leisurely and David stepped from the passage to meet him.

"Good lad!" he said, and gripped the boy's arm in the familiar way. Frank flushed with excitement.

"Gloves on, Frank!" ordered David, but the youth's eyes clouded in dismay.

"I've forgotten them, Holt," he whispered.

"Put this on, then, quick," said the other, stripping off his right hand glove. His tone was quiet and

friendly, for he must not upset the lad by his anger. But he was very angry. David swung the boy round to face him, and stared into his eyes for a moment.

"She's inside!" he murmured.

Frank blinked but said nothing. He knew his part, but it was not real to him. It never had been real; always it was the shock of David's will that upset him. Now he was dazed by David. Holt took the parcel from under the boy's arm and with his left hand pressed the hammer into Frank's gloved fingers. He felt them clutch the handle. Then they stepped quietly into the corridor outside the suite and David stretched his hand—still his left hand—towards Constance's door.

He could hear somebody moving in the bedroom. That was Constance's room—she would be putting the final touches to the toilet with which she was to charm David. Perhaps if she looked very smart, and pleased David this afternoon, he would not forget her when she went to Paris with his uncle and aunt. Dear God, Paris would be so dreary without David. Dear God, let him really love her. Dear God, let him come early. She heard the usual street cries, the remote rumbling of the traffic; perhaps David had been run over, now, just outside the hotel. There was the jewel case on the table; she knew just what she wanted to wear; she would try and make David choose it for her. All the time she fussed between cupboard and dressing table—adding a little something here, removing it on her next journey to the mirror.

The door opened and two men came in silently. It was David, and he had his hand on the shoulder of another man, and in that man's hand was something —something awful. David looked at her—at her, Constance—so strangely, with his pale face and staring black eyes. The room was full of terror—of awful

inexplicable terror, so that she leaned against the table and tried to shout, but she couldn't. David's face—she fixed her eyes on David's face—it filled the room, like the awful fear which assailed her brain.

"Oh, David!" she croaked, and she heard him say, "Frank!" like a call, like a command. And the other man, his eyes were staring too, lurched up to her as she tried to scream, her mouth pulled into stiff lines . . . she couldn't manage her mouth. She knew his arm went up, she knew the hammer was descending, she knew it was her death, but she only saw David's pale, inhuman face, the white face driving the machine which killed her. So that was what David had meant by it all. That was the end of Constance.

"Good lad!" said David, steadily. "Here, Frank!' His voice was level, definite. "Watch me, Frank!"

He swept Constance's garments from the table to the floor—the whole room was littered with clothes, for Constance had been making her very best toilet—and unwrapped Frank's cardboard box. He put in the jewel case and tied it up again neatly.

"Frank!" said David again. The boy had been leaning for support against the table, his mouth half open, watching Holt. Now he had slipped beyond control. He was down on his unsteady knees, holding the dead woman's head and shoulders on his lap, his eyes glassy and vacant. He patted the head and crooned gently. "It was all a mistake," said Frank, half laughing—"it was all a mistake."

He looked up at David, and David, with a face like a rock, looked at him. It's all right, whispered his brain, you're in charge—keep control. Like a silver thread his intention shone before him—if he kept to his purpose no horror could shake him.

"It's all right, Frank," said David, and tried to

hold the boy's eyes, to drag him back from that abyss of mental chaos. But the boy smiled and looked vaguely down at the terrible head and shoulders across his knees.

If Frank's gone mad, thought David, I'll give the alarm now and let him risk it by himself. Say I walked in upon the scene, discovered it. Then I should not get the jewels. No, thought David, I will have those jewels.

David put the parcel, heavy enough now, on the table, and took Frank by the shoulder. He pulled the boy to his feet by sheer strength, all the time staring into his eyes with all the intensified purpose he could muster. The body of the woman slipped to the floor and the boy shook under his hands. Frank's own hands, and his trousers from knee to waist, were covered with blood.

Still holding the lad, David opened the bedroom door and looked cautiously along the corridor. There was no one in sight.

He dragged Frank from the room, dragged him into the bathroom next door, and made him wash the stains from his hands. David himself sponged the lad's head with cold water.

Frank came to himself with a start and clung to David.

"That's all right, my boy," said the older man, as kindly as he had ever spoken, and the pleasant words soothed the poor lad.

"Holt!" he whispered. "Oh, Holt!"

"All right now, Frank?" asked the other man sharply, still looking at the lad. "Brace up, Frank, we've done it now."

"All right, Holt," answered Frank weakly. "God, I'm in a mess. Oh, God!"

"Yes, wait here!" ordered David. He went into

the bedroom, took the jewel case in its brown wrappings, picked up his raincoat, and then surveyed the room. He left the hammer lying where Frank had dropped it. Frank had dropped the glove, too, but David did not see that; it was under the dead woman's head. He looked at Constance's dead body, but his expression did not change. He went out and shut the door deliberately. Frank looked saner now.

"Put on this, Frank!" he said peremptorily. Frank put on David's raincoat, and buttoned it, covering the stains. "Take the parcel," ordered David. Frank took it, dumbly.

"Get on, Frank, now. Go out the back way to the place where I met you just now—six minutes ago," added David, with the ghost of a smile.

Frank went away. As he turned into the passage leading to the side entrance David followed him down the corridor, stick swinging at his elbow, perfectly neat, perfectly composed.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DAVID walked sedately down the corridor, humming a little song. He saw no sign of Frank as he reached the corner and began to descend the great staircase. He was sure that the boy would make a successful exit; he believed in his luck. Why should he not?

From the final flight of stairs he surveyed the crowd below him. A few smart officers stood about in graceful ease; otherwise the world appeared to be a very busy place. Everybody appeared to have an important message to deliver—and to be engaged in delivering it. A pursy provincial blocked his way at the foot, didactically laying down the law, stout forefinger tapping opposite palm, while his bored listener strove for opportunity to escape and looked everywhere but in the orator's face.

Everyone seemed petty, trivial—ripe for the murderer. David came down the steps feeling detached, like a god; the noisy fellow in his path bored him. He had an impulse to halt on the stairs and address the throng, to announce in a loud and conversational tone: "I say, I've just had one of you people murdered"—only no one would believe him.

But there would be a great silence. All the soldiers would suddenly look inexpressibly alert, intensely efficient, but they wouldn't know what to do, bless them. Somebody nodded to David, and he smiled his friendliest smile. He walked towards the door in his unperturbed, cat-like manner. The friendly commissionaire sprang to open it. David passed out. Mechanically

he felt for his other glove, and then he remembered that Frank had worn it.

He was aware of a cry, a deferential shout, as he turned into the Strand, but he paid no attention. It was not an urgent cry, not an agitated alarm. David quickened his pace as he turned the corner, and positively ran when he got into the side street leading to the Embankment. Frank might be fainting all over the place, for all he knew.

But the boy was waiting, and the parcel was safe enough under his arm, as David noted. Frank's hands were bare; David noted that too. His face was so white that people glanced at him as they passed, and occasional fits of shivering made him touch the wall for support. Holt had feared complete breakdown, however, and this was much better.

"Frank!" said David, gently, and clasped the lad's hand.

"You've saved us all, Frank!" David murmured, and pressed his hand tightly. But the appalling inadequacy of words made the older man hesitate; he felt as if he had lost his grip. His godhead was gone. There was nothing to say, anyway, beyond orders. If Frank were capable of returning home successfully, Holt had no time to spare for his mental re-establishment.

"Where's that glove, Frank?" he asked, with the faintest flicker of agitation in his voice.

"I don't know. Back there!" The boy shook like a leaf. David stripped off his left glove and pushed it into the pocket of the rain-coat Frank was wearing, and he grinned, too, at the intense effort he had to make in order to control his desire to pick up Frank and strangle him.

"God!" muttered the boy. David understood that

the lad had been repeating that ever since he had left him outside the suite. But there was no time now, no time at all. He spoke clearly and definitely.

"Take the tram to Westminster, Frank," he said, pointing. "Then cross to Victoria Street and take a 'bus. You know, there's one that will carry you nearly all the way."

"I know," said Frank, dully.

"Will you be all right?"

"Yes," answered the boy, without looking up.

"Then wait in your room until I come. I'll be with you in two hours. Brace up, and trust me."

Even at that moment Frank wondered why David's words meant nothing to him. It was like a dummy of David talking; it was like David's dead body using David's words. But the instructions were clear enough. Frank clung to the instructions.

"Yes," he said, and moved away. For a second the older man stared at him thoughtfully, and then he sprang after the boy.

"She's stunned, Frank. She may get over it," he muttered in his ear.

"What!" cried Frank, turning. "Oh, Holt!" His face flushed. His whole bearing changed.

"Get on now," ordered David. "I'll tell you later."

That inspiration would carry the lad home; he knew it would not serve him for a longer space. Frank was not a perfect fool, and he had held the woman's crushed head upon his knee. David shuddered at that. He waited for nothing more, but posted off at top speed to rejoin Sophie.

Now he passed the broad, short street leading to the Russe, and he glanced quickly towards the great glass doors of the hotel. It was in his mind to retrieve that glove which Frank had left. This plan was his own,

the scheme was all his own, and he would not have it bungled.

He hesitated, but there was a hurrying to and fro behind the glass; it was not wise to take such a risk. In thirty seconds he stood before Sophie's table and smiled down at her accusing face. He had been away eleven minutes.

"Well, my dear!" he said. "Not so very long, what!"

"Hours, Davy, hours!" replied the girl, and continued to gaze reproachfully into his cheerful face. She had no idea how long he had been gone; an apparently unattached young man had been sitting at the next table, and Miss Carmichael was never lonely for long. His dismissal, and David's return, had formed a happy coincidence.

"No, Davy," she said, graciously, when he had sufficiently humbled himself. "You were quick. Did you get the money?"

"Case wasn't there—must have left it at home—and my aunt wasn't in the hotel," he answered. "So I borrowed ten shillings from her maid."

Sophie looked jealous, and David laughed.

"Great friend of mine," he said, carelessly. "Pretty name, too—Constance!"

"Silly name, I think!"

"She was christened it, anyway," replied the man, with malicious implication. Sophie flushed and was furious.

"You're horrid, Davy!" she cried. "You are horrid!"

She was near tears, and it took David fifteen minutes to make her happy again. It amused him, rather. All the time his brain was revolving the matter of Frank. He felt as if half of him were sitting here dallying with

this little fool of a girl, while the other half, the superior half, was out in the world coping with his affairs, getting Frank off to Codnor with the jewels, carrying out little innocent touches which, when they came out at the inquiry, would make suggestion of his guilt seem ridiculous. But he must behave normally now; this tea-party was a very strong piece of work; he must do nothing to spoil its effect. Sophie would be a witness. He realized that he was reckless and silly to tease her, and then he chuckled again, for if it was normal behaviour which was desired, a quarrel with Sophie and Sophie's tears were the most natural things in the world.

"I want to get Frank away——" The words reiterated themselves in his brain. That was the point of it all. Let the boy get into the train, physically competent, without observation, and then David could face the world—meaning the representatives of law and order—without a care. He wondered if it would have been wise to tell the lad to push off for Codnor without waiting for him, David. But his brain assured him that he had acted wisely. He knew Frank. Frank simply wouldn't have gone. David pondered, with a smiling face and a merry tongue. He was not worried in the least, and rallied Sophie with perfect charm.

After tea they walked down the Strand together, while David argued, with the utmost good temper, about the necessity for his immediate departure.

"Good Lord, my dear," he explained. "I've promised to go down to Brighton with my uncle and aunt, and I've got to telephone to 'em, and to pack some gear, and God knows what else. I really must push off, Sophie."

"Take me with you," Sophie suggested, brightly.

"Too banal," announced the young man instantly, without thought. "No, dammit, my dear, I'm going

down with my people. That's partly why I left you, to go to the hotel and tell 'em, only they weren't in, and so I'll have to telephone."

"Dinner, Monday night, what?" said David, finally, and we'll go somewhere after, and dance."

This pleased the girl, and he put her into a taxi with no more delay. Another taxi driver beckoned to him, but David spurned him regretfully. Taxi drivers had a bad habit of remembering their fares—he was always reading of identification cases in the papers—and the young man wanted to go straight to Frank's rooms. He caught a 'bus at Charing Cross. That risk was unavoidable, for he had no time to walk.

It had been borne in upon David during tea that he could risk no delay in the disposal of Frank. He had intended to return to Ebury Street, see his landlord on some excuse, merely to establish the fact of his return, and then sally forth to St. George's Square. But time was so peculiarly fleeting—suppose the police had found his address, were waiting for him at Ebury Street, picked him up before he could deal with Frank! The whole thing would be a fiasco—he would look a perfect fool. True, that implied the immediate discovery of the murder, which was unreasonable, but David was taking no avoidable risks. Already there was the matter of the missing glove.

He went straight into the station when he got off the omnibus, and bought a railway ticket for Frank—to Brighton. Then he went directly to St. George's Square, praying that no detective-story policeman was already upon his track. David felt about it in exactly that way.

Frank's rooms were on the first floor, he knew, though he had never entered them. But he had bidden the boy good night on occasion, standing on the pavement outside the house, with Frank leaning out of the window

above the front door. The geography of the place should offer no difficulties ; please God, the front door would be open and he could get upstairs without notice.

It was open ; the whole square drowsed in somnolent silence. David went upstairs like a cat, tried the door of the first room on the right, and entered without hesitation.

Frank started from his knees by the bed and screamed like a trapped animal, not loudly.

" Oh, God, Holt, I thought it was the police!" he whimpered. " Oh, God, Holt, she must have been killed! She must have been killed, you know, Holt. Her head was all smashed. Perhaps she wasn't killed, only stunned! Oh, God, tell me——" He flung himself down by the bedside, but turned his face to watch David, his eyes mad with fear. His fingers clutched at the bed-cover. His young face was drawn into dreadful lines, and in his staring eyes the whole iris was visible.

David stood in the centre of the room, big and strong and tall. He held out both his hands to the lad, silently, and his face was kind and all-comprehending and strong. Frank came to him, suddenly, like a maid to her lover, and clung to his arm, babbling incoherent words.

David drew him to the bed, and they sat half facing each other. He shifted his hold, and clasped Frank's hands in his own firm fingers. So they stayed for a time, quietly, while the boy stared into the older man's face and found strength in the grip of his hands and his strong, confident, half-quizzical expression. This was the old Holt, Frank felt. God, it was good to have Holt here. He hadn't wanted him before. David felt his own power and was glad. He thought that

Frank would probably be ill-balanced for the rest of his life.

"Frank!" drawled David, after a time, looking into his face with kind, searching eyes. "Frank!" There was gentle chiding in his tone.

"So you didn't trust me, Frank. Couldn't you face it, lad?" He tightened his clasp of Frank's hands.

"I could, Holt—I could—only she must have been killed. I thought they'd come every minute. Oh, God—everybody was watching me, Holt!"

"Nonsense, Frank, nonsense. You're worn out, excited, and no wonder." David spoke slowly, with a confident, undisturbed ring in his voice. "I've seen things worse that that, Frank my lad, and people get over 'em. That blood looked bad, I know, but it was just blood. No, Frank——" he raised his voice a trifle, "no, my friend, don't you get excited until you find you've got something to be excited about." He paused, but the boy continued to stare into his face, his lips moving silently. Frank was conning it over, looking for a loop-hole. David must not allow that.

"Now, stop, Frank!" he ordered, authoritatively, but with his face as kind as ever. He shook the boy's limp hands as he talked. "Change your clothes, my friend, and we'll talk while you're making yourself beautiful. Come now—quick!" He pulled the boy to his feet, and banged him smartly on the shoulder.

"That's past, now, Frank, d'you understand? I'm going to help you pack."

The boy plucked at his coat with ineffectual fumblings, and David laughed at him while he busied himself with Frank's bag.

"You wait, my lad," he grinned, "until we're up in Yorkshire together playing about on the moors.

Then you'll laugh at yourself for losing your nerve now. Chuck us those garments."

He took Frank's discarded disguise, and crammed it into the bag. The jewel-case, well wrapped up, was already in the bottom.

"I haven't lost my grip, Holt," Frank denied, with sanity that surprised the older man. "Only when I think—oh, my God, Holt, her head——" he broke down again, his whole form shaking, and collapsed on the bed, his face buried in his arms. David gripped his hands again, made him look up, soothed him as no other man on earth could have done. The poor lad responded more quickly now.

"Couldn't you come down with me, Holt?" he implored. "I can't stay there by myself." He shuddered at the thought of an empty house.

"Your housekeeper's there, Frank. You'll find it's the best thing. Stay in your room a lot, go about by yourself until I can join you——"

Frank interrupted him with a fresh terror.

"Supposing the police came down, Holt. Oh, God!" The boy wavered between the horrors his poor mind conjured up; his lips fell apart and his eyes stared wildly into vacancy. He knew she was dead; he could see her. All her head was crushed—he saw it as it lay on his knee. And there was blood and dust on her hair. Dust from the floor, of course, mixed with blood. There wasn't any blood when they hanged a fellow. They put a rope round your neck and blindfolded you, and a clergyman was there, with his head bent over a book. Frank saw it all. And then there was the trial, and the stone cell with an iron bar in the tiny high window, and the long-drawn-out, agonizing, periods of waiting—in the cell—oh, God, you don't mind dying but you

can't go through all that—not all through that never-ending horror. First they came up and arrested you—God, there was somebody at the front door now. Frank whimpered sharply and glanced wildly round for a place to hide. David looked up.

"Don't stand about in your shirt," said David, crossly, "Put on your trousers and don't be a fool!"

Frank, surprised out of hysteria, meekly dressed himself, while David locked the bag and strapped it.

"You can leave that locked, my friend," he advised him. "I'll deal with it when I come down. All the things you'll want are in your coat pocket." He continued talking with his back to Frank. "Look here, Frank," he said. "I'm the man who'll be arrested, if anyone is. I shall take all responsibility." He swung on his heel and looked the boy in the face. "I shall say I did it, Frank, and no one will ever know anything about you. So you're all right, d'you see. Nothing can harm you. Understand that!"

Relief surged in Frank's soul; Holt would get him out of it—he always had got him out. But he couldn't let——

"Holt!" he expostulated, weakly.

"That's all. Now shut up," replied David, in his pleasant manner. "Got on your swishest suit, Frank—that's rather wise. I bet you feel better just for that."

Frank admitted that he did.

"Now," David continued, "off you go. You're going to Brighton, Frank, and on to your place from there, and your train goes in——" he glanced at his watch—"half an hour. Here's your ticket to Brighton. I don't want you to wait about in London after I've gone," he stated candidly, "and that's why I'm sending

you the longest way. It'll keep you occupied." David smiled at the lad, and then gripped his hand suddenly.

"You've done well, Frank," he said. "Brace up, and we'll get through all right. You know about your train on from Brighton?"

"Yes, Holt."

"All right, then. You told your landlady yesterday, didn't you? Has that bag got your name and address on? Good! Get on now, you poor ditherer, and don't lose your train."

Frank smiled, the very ghost of a smile, and departed for Victoria. He never saw David again.

David shrugged his shoulders and mopped his brow, and made his way to Ebury Street. He considered, philosophically enough, that the lad would be all right as long as he kept moving, just as long as he had something definite to do. After that, if he couldn't get away from London himself—well, it was on the knees of the gods.

To the best of his knowledge, no one had noticed him leave or enter the house in St. George's Square; he intended to stay in his rooms, now, until the police came for him.

It was a quarter past six. Nearly an hour and three quarters since he had killed Constance. They would be after him soon, probably, if they weren't already. David imagined some difficulty for the police in finding his address, unless his uncle and aunt turned up unexpectedly. His telephone was in his landlord's name. He set his lips and conjectured coolly that he would need all his brains.

But there were no hours of suspense in store for the man. David had an amusing theory that the police frequently pretended to be individually incompetent,

in order to conceal a certain too-precise and mechanical efficiency. Now he smiled to himself. A man, a very ordinary looking man, was pacing with familiar tread on the pavement across the street. He glanced casually at David as the young man halted outside his front door.

David let himself into the house in his unhurried manner, closed the door leisurely enough, and then ran upstairs with sudden speed. He reached his sitting-room window just in time to see the fellow opposite move hastily into the side street leading to the nearest post office.

"He'll telephone," murmured David, standing thoughtfully in the middle of the sitting-room, "and in twenty minutes they'll all be buzzing round. Now——" he went rapidly into his bedroom and returned in a moment with an unworn pair of gloves. It was precisely similar to the pair he had taken with him to the Hotel Russe, of which he had given Frank one glove, to his undoing, and later placed the other in the rain-coat pocket. Both pairs were unmarked except for the maker's name. Frank's glove, of course, was in the hands of the police, and so he had to dispose of this identical pair, bought at the same time in the same shop, before these experts found them and began to compare notes.

David paced the room, seeking a hiding place. He couldn't burn them, even if he would, for there was no fire; and anyway, David had read too many detective stories, with suspicious half-charred fragments discovered in the grate to confound the evildoer. He paused before the bookshelves, pinching his chin, meditating concealment between the dullest volume and the wall. Which was the dullest volume? One man's meat is another man's poison. Then he saw

the bottom shelf, and grinned. Here was an ancient edition of the Encyclopædia, very large, very heavy, very tightly wedged into a space too small for it. He dragged out the second volume, and opened it on the floor. The gloves were thin, flat and unwrinkled. David put them between the pages, shut the book, and returned it to its place. There was no sign of their presence; the pages lay smoothly together. David chuckled; he had ten minutes more.

There was not a paper in the place bearing Frank's name or Frank's address, or anything relating to the boy. David had cleared out all that long ago. He hoped and believed that Jimmy, the landlord, did not know Frank's address. David thought of Jimmy now, and he went outside, and, leaning over the banisters, shouted loudly for tea. It was his habit to have tea at this awkward hour, for he preferred his dinner to be as late as possible.

David returned to his room and sat for a moment in his chair, holding his head between his hands and racking his brain for any possible negligence. The sound of a car in the street, still some distance away, brought him to his feet. Men said, in war time, that they could detect the hostile battery firing upon their own particular location amidst the noise of all the other guns; so David, hearing a motor car in the distance among the other traffic, knew it instinctively for his fate. He took up the telephone deliberately.

"Is that the Russe?" he asked in a moment. A car stopped outside the house, and the man's lips curled in a grin, an unpleasant, contemptuous grin. Yet David did not feel contemptuous about the police; he only despised the world.

"Will you put me through to Baron Giusti?" he said, in his pleasant voice. "Number three hundred

and twenty-seven, I think." Some unaccountable delay, apparently.

"Mr. David Holt," said David. "Three two seven, I want." People were trampling on the stairs.

He heard the manipulation of switches.

"Hello, is that Constance?" asked David, without waiting for somebody to speak. "I want to know——"

He was interrupted.

"Holt is my name, yes," said David, impatiently. "David Holt. What's the matter? Is the Baron there?"

Jimmy, the landlord, burst into the room, with a scared face. A tall fellow entered close behind him.

"Sir——" exclaimed Jimmy.

David looked up over the telephone with a slight frown, and beckoned at them with his open hand to keep quiet.

"An accident?" said David. "Constance?"

The two men stood there silently. Another stranger tiptoed in through the open door.

"Good God!" exclaimed David. "Why—I was there talking to her this afternoon—not two hours ago!"

The telephone rattled and murmured.

"God!" said David again. He glanced up and noticed his crowded room. "What the devil!" he cried, irritably. He returned to the telephone.

"Yes—yes, of course—I'll come round at once . . . hold on a minute—the place is full of people!"

The tall stranger stepped round behind David and took the receiver from his hand.

"Excuse me, Mr. Holt!" he said. He spoke into the telephone. "Peake speaking—this is Peake."

The telephone rattled.

"We just came down to tell Mr. Holt," said Peake. "Yes, we'll bring him round with us in the car . . .

twenty minutes . . . " he turned his face to David: " That be all right, Mr. Holt ? "

" Of course," David answered.

" All right ! " said Peake into the telephone and hung up the receiver.

David was pacing the room. " My God ! " he said. " Why——" he nearly ran into his landlady, who opened the door and entered cautiously with a tray.

" Hearing a visitor I brought up an extra cup," she said, " thinking it might be——"

" No time for tea, Mrs. Harrison ! " cried David. " Awful thing's happened—awful."

He brushed past her into the hall and took his hat. " Come on—come on ! " he cried impatiently, and the two policemen followed him down to the car.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE Baron pressed into the crowded foyer, and bowed smartly, though with some difficulty.

"A surprise, meine Rosalie!" he announced.

"Dino, it is you!" The Baroness beamed and came forward with hands outstretched. Behind her advanced her friend, a large lady of profound presence and tremendous, unseasonable furs. The Baron was presented, and they stood, these massive people, on the top of the theatre steps, dividing the throng like an island in the Strand. The Baron and Baroness made no attempt to conceal their pleasure at seeing each other.

"It is because we finished so early," he explained. "I thought—there is my wife, my Rosa. I will go to her; she shall not come to me." She patted his fat hand. "Let us, then, go home to tea," he added, briskly, and hailed a taxi.

But the splendid personage demurred. "Since you will not come with me, Rosalie," she said, "I shall go home." She smiled; pleadings were of no avail. The Baron bowed, the Baroness fluttered, the parting was accomplished.

"It is good for you to walk, my Dino," ventured the Baroness, doubtfully, but she did not hesitate when the door of the taxi-cab was held open for her.

"Late for the tea already!" the Baron said, and glanced at his watch. It was half-past five.

"How was the play, then—it was good?" he asked, politely.

"*Ah, c'était—moche!*" replied his wife, expressively, and shrugged her shoulders and grimaced. "*Geradezu ekelhaft!*"

Her husband murmured in deprecation. These two understood the byways of four languages, and were never at a loss for the precise words to express a shade of meaning.

"And your conversation, my Dino, your meeting?"

"It was a conference, Rosa—it was very well." His tone forbade light talk, though he permitted his wife to pat his hand at intervals. The Baron wanted his tea. The Baroness wanted to give it to him. The taxi sped on towards the Russe.

"So!" cried Giusti, with a sigh of relief, and he helped his wife to alight before the great glass doors of the hotel. His wife glanced over her shoulder and exclaimed in surprise.

"Dino!" she said. "There is a policeman." And indeed there was a policeman, standing in solemn majesty before the silent doors. The Baroness very nearly screamed. Instead of the pleasant bustle of a huge hotel, here was a building like a tomb. A tomb —and thirty yards away was the hurrying Strand. She feared and hated the abnormal; she clung to her husband's arm.

The constable gazed impassively at the two opulently stout people approaching him.

"No one allowed to enter, sir!" he remarked.

"But I am staying here!" cried the Baron. He heaved his fat shoulders like an angry bull and attempted to push past the constable, but the arm of the law forbade his entry. He looked at his wife for a suggestion; this kind of thing was new to him. The Baron was at a loss.

"Your name, sir?" suggested the policeman.

A flicker of interest stirred his stolid countenance as the Baron announced himself, and he tapped smartly on the glass door behind him. It was opened in a moment by a tall fellow in ordinary clothes.

"Berron and Berroness," said the policeman, and indicated the financier and his wife.

"Ah!" The tall man was interested. "Of course the Baron and Baroness must come in."

The great hall was odd, too, with little vague groups of scared and silent people; but it was better than the unaccustomed blankness without.

"My Rosa, it is that everybody is mad," remarked the Baron, and tapped his forehead sadly.

"No, sir." The man who had admitted them spoke earnestly. "There's been a bad accident, and we want your help. This way, please."

He stepped off towards the manager's office. But the Baron was furious and would not follow.

"It is that I want my tea!" he stated at the top of his voice. "What do I make with your accident? Come, Rosalie!"

He attempted to force his way into the lift, in spite of the shocked murmurs of the bystanders. Fortunately the locked grille prevented another tragedy.

The man in the plain clothes whispered hurriedly in the ear of the Baroness, and she took charge of her exasperated husband.

"You must come, Dino," she said. "It is about Constance—something has happened, I do not know what. I knew something would happen."

"Why does he not say, then?" stormed the Baron.

About him was all the smug solemnity, the uneasy rustling, the penetrating British whispers of an English church at about one minute before eleven o'clock of a Sunday morning. It drove the Baron to fury. He

opened his mouth to speak, closed it, tried once more to expostulate, and failed again.

The manager met them at the door of his room and, whispering apologies, led them to stiff and uncomfortable chairs. The small room was full of people. There was an urbane and grey-haired man who appeared to dominate the gathering. He sat at the table with a notebook in front of him. There was the hotel doctor. The Baroness knew him, for she had had a cold and had imagined it to be the deadliest brand of influenza. Opposite him stood an alert youth in the hotel livery, who whistled almost imperceptibly between his teeth. A chambermaid sobbed hysterically in the corner, and beside her sat the deferential hotel clerk, whom they all knew. A commissionaire, clinging to facts and duties that he understood, stood by the door and closed it after the Baron and Baroness had entered.

"And now, what is it that you wish?" asked the Baron quietly, but with a dangerous undercurrent of suppressed rage in his voice. The grey-haired man at the table glanced sharply at him and opened his mouth to reply, but the unhappy hotel manager fled to his side and whispered words of imploring caution. The Baron would never come again to his hotel. No one would ever come again to his hotel. The grey-haired man nodded and stood up in his place.

"You are Baron and Baroness Giusti, I believe," he said, smoothly, and bowed. "I had better introduce myself. My name is Reynolds and I am from the Investigation Department at Scotland Yard. Er—your maid has been——"

"It is better that you should explain everything," interrupted the Baroness. "We know nothing, and my husband, the Baron, is impatient."

The detective bowed again. He was accustomed to impatient people.

"I will endeavour to do my best to explain," he said, politely, and the Baron spluttered.

"A chambermaid on the third floor entered your suite this afternoon and discovered your maid, your confidential servant, I believe, stretched on the floor in her bedroom. She had been badly hurt." The chambermaid sobbed convulsively and drew everybody's eyes.

"Hurt—Constance!" cried the Baroness. Suddenly she understood. "You mean she is——"

"Yes, she is dead," said the detective, and looked at them kindly.

"Ah!" The Baron groaned. He shuddered violently and a tear rolled down his fat cheek. The Baroness moved her chair closer and took his arm for mutual support. "Tell us, then," she said.

The investigator picked up his notebook.

"At ten minutes to five this afternoon," he continued, "Mary Bennett, the chambermaid, entered suite No. 327, for the purpose, I believe, of conversing with the confidential servant of—your confidential servant, I mean. On going into the woman's bedroom"—the Baron winced—"she saw the body lying on the floor. Obviously she had suffered violence. She then ran screaming down the corridor towards the lifts, where the lift-boy"—the alert youth in livery straightened himself—"soothed her and took her at once to the manager's office. This room. The manager locked the maid in his room and went upstairs at once to ascertain the truth. Finding the maid's statement correct he telephoned to Scotland Yard, with great promptitude"—here the hotel manager and the detective bowed simultaneously—"and——"

"But why?" cried the Baroness, unable to contain herself. "Why was Constance killed? Oh, it is terrible!"

"We shall be able to tell you that very soon, I hope," answered the detective.

"But who did it—you must know something?"

"You must allow us a little time," said the detective, and paused for a moment. "We have already questioned the servants, and we have here everybody who may be able to help us at the present stage. You see, we have not finished the inquiry."

Then he became brisk.

"The clerk at the desk, please!"

Behind him the hotel-clerk straightened himself and came round to the table. Everybody was quiet. Reynolds looked at the young man in a friendly way.

"You know something about three-two-seven, I think," he said. "Let's have it—everything you can remember."

"Just to-day, sir?"

"Tell us about to-day, first."

"I had a telephone call just after lunch, sir, to know if the Baron and Baroness were in. They weren't in."

"Ah," said the detective. "And who was it?"

"Mr. Holt, sir—Mr. David Holt. The——"

Here the Baroness interrupted. She turned to her husband and nodded. "That is our nephew," she announced, "so you need not waste the time."

"We must try and learn everything we can, madame, you see," said the detective. He turned to the clerk. "What did Mr. Holt say?"

"He said he would probably come in this afternoon as he wanted to see the Baron and Baroness Giusti."

"And did he come in?"

"Only it was to tell us about Brighton!" cried the Baroness.

The detective brought his hand down sharply on the table, making everybody jump.

"Later, madame, later you shall speak. Continue!"

"Yes, sir," said the clerk. "About half-past four, or perhaps a little earlier."

There was a gentle sensation throughout the room. Everybody moved in his chair.

"How do you know this?"

"Mr. Holt came to my desk and asked me if the Baron and Baroness were upstairs. I told him I thought not, but he insisted on going upstairs to make sure."

"But why did you not telephone?"

"Mr. Holt wished to go upstairs," answered the clerk. Then, as he liked David, he added, "Mr. Holt said something about coming out without any money—I understood——"

"That he wanted to obtain some from his relatives, what?"

"Yes, sir," said the clerk.

"Of course!" cried the Baroness.

"When did he come downstairs again?"

"I didn't see him, sir, when he came down."

"We must have Mr. Holt here," remarked the detective, "without doubt." He turned to the Baron. "Now, sir," he continued smoothly, "if you will let me have Mr. Holt's address?"

"But it is absurd!" cried the Baroness, and turned to her husband. The Baron had not heard the question. "That poor Con-stantz," he whispered. "How long, Rosalie—sixteen—seventeen years? The poor Constance." He was crouched absurdly on his chair, and his tears had fallen between his knees and shone wet on the carpet.

"My Dino—I know!" said the Baroness and the tears rolled down her cheeks too. Still weeping, she opened the little bag upon her lap and gave the detective one of David's cards with his Ebury Street address. Mr. Reynolds took the card, turned it round and looked at the back, and then became very businesslike. He sent the youth in livery for the plain-clothes man out in the hall, and when that official arrived, he gave the man rapid whispered instructions, tapping all the time on the table with David's card. Then he handed him the card and sent him away.

"Mr. David Holt will soon be here to help us, I hope," he said, and bowed to the Baroness.

The Baron and Baroness looked at each other, not knowing whether to be angry at the summary orders sent out for the disposal of their nephew, or to be pleased because David was coming. Finally they decided to be pleased, for they did not understand these matters, and they felt that David, an Englishman, would be better fitted to cope with them.

"Sit down," said Reynolds, to the clerk, and turned to the manager. "Wasn't there another man who knew something?"

The manager beckoned to the commissionaire, who came forward in his turn.

"Ah, yes," said the detective. "And what do you know about this?"

"Nothing, sir," replied the man, flatly.

Every one looked disappointed except the hotel clerk, who stood up quickly:

"He was on the door, sir, all the afternoon."

"Ah, I see!" said the detective. "Well, is there some man that you particularly noticed that you're going to tell me about?"

"Why, no, sir," The commissionaire looked worried.

"Mr. Holt!" prompted the clerk in a loud whisper.

"Yes, sir, I saw Mr. Holt come in," said the door-keeper, relieved.

"Ah!" The detective was pleased. "How did you know Mr. Holt?"

"We all know him, sir—he comes here pretty frequent——" the commissionaire apologetically indicated the Baron and Baroness with his thumb.

"What time did you open the door for Mr. Holt?"

"I'm not quite sure, sir. Between a quarter and half-past four."

"That's rather vague. Come, man, it was only an hour ago. You must remember."

But the ex-soldier remembered the time suggested by the hotel clerk, and stuck to it.

"Mr. Holt came out again in three or four minutes, sir," he volunteered. The detective watched him and he thought heavily. "That was just after the half-hour went, sir—so he must have come in just before half-past." He finished with an inspired air.

"Ah—you're sure of that?"

"Yes, sir."

"Mr. Holt looked perfectly normal, I suppose—wasn't hurrying particularly—looked ordinary?"

"Yes, sir. He seemed in a bit of a hurry. He left his rain-coat behind."

"That is very interesting," said the detective. "You're sure he had it with him when he entered?"

"Yes, sir. I called after Mr. Holt when he came out, when I noticed he hadn't the coat over his arm like he had when he came in, but he didn't hear me—so I thought maybe he left it on purpose, p'raps."

"I see," said Mr. Reynolds, and gazed pensively at the clerk and the commissionaire. He had an adroit

habit of taking notes and watching his witnesses simultaneously. "All right!" he said, suddenly. "I shall want you two again in a few minutes, so don't go away."

"Now, doctor!" he said, and smiled politely. "You said just now that you reached suite No. 327 soon after five o'clock." The doctor nodded. "You found the body of Constance Wells in her bedroom. She had been killed with some heavy instrument, probably a hammer——"

"It was a hammer!" said the doctor, definitely.

"Ah, yes, a hammer. Now, doctor, can you tell me, after consideration, how long the woman had been dead?"

"Not more than an hour," replied the doctor, without a moment's consideration.

"Might it have been half an hour?" asked the detective, sharply.

"It might," said the doctor. "Perhaps. A matter of minutes is impossible to determine. Do you wish me to go more deeply into it?" He glanced meaningly at the Baron and Baroness, who sat with miserable faces, too wretched to protest.

"No," said the detective slowly. "No—not now. Thank you very much."

"Why—why!" cried the Baron, suddenly rising to his feet. "Why all this? Is there no reason for it?"

"I hope to come to it, sir," answered the detective, with strained patience. The two men stared at each other, until the Baron sat down again with a spiritless gesture of his hands. "You do not help me, sir," continued Reynolds, aggressively. "Please answer my questions now, and we may find out something." Suddenly he smiled very kindly and changed his tone. "You must not mind these questions," he added.

"How long had Wells been in your service?"

"Sixteen or seventeen years," answered the Baroness quickly.

"Can you tell me her age, please?"

The Baroness considered. "She was seventeen years old when she came to us," she said. "Thirty-three, then, about."

"Now this is a very important question, madame," announced the detective. "Was Wells engaged——"

"Sacred name!" shouted the Baron. "Is it that you cannot call her Constance?"

The detective was taken aback, but continued steadily. "Was she engaged to be married——" both the Baron and Baroness opened their mouths to ejaculate, but Reynolds' uplifted hand stayed them—"or was she in love with anybody—or had she been in love—had she any love affairs of which you know—if you can think of anything at all, please tell me?"

"It is nothing of the kind with Constance!" said the Baron, conclusively. The detective nodded, watching them.

"I understand that she was your trusted servant. You trusted her implicitly—in confidential matters?"

"We trust her always," cried the Baron and Baroness together. Giusti continued: "She does everything for us—she carries up the jewel-case—— Ah!"

The blood receded from Giusti's fat cheeks, leaving them dingy yellow. He turned rapidly upon his wife.

"You had told Constance to get the jewels to take to Brighton, yes?"

"No, Dino, no! I had said nothing!" cried the Baroness. The air was vibrant with excitement—the witnesses trembled, actually, on the edges of their chairs—only the detective was calm, and he tapped his fingers idly but triumphantly, upon the table. The

hotel manager leant forward and touched his arm. He was very pale, too.

" Perhaps we should see if the Baron's jewels are in the safe outside ? " he whispered.

" I think it is quite time," said the detective emphatically.

The manager caught at the telephone with trembling fingers. He was so nervous that it took him a long moment of agony to explain that he wanted the clerk in charge of the safe.

" Are the jewels of the Baron Giusti in the safe ? "

There was dead silence in the room. The Baron licked his dry lips, and the Baroness clutched his hand. They heard a voice, strong and definite.

" Only the small case ? " said the manager, faintly. Blood flooded his cheeks.

The voice was loud in explanation.

" You will make sure ! " said the manager.

" Yes . . . yes . . . yes . . . 3.50 p.m. . . . yes . . . you have the receipt . . . yes."

The manager turned a frightened face upon the Giustis. " Bring the slip here, then," he said despairingly, and hung up the receiver.

" Well," said Giusti sharply. " Well—what is it ? " He seemed in perfect control of himself.

" Monsieur—madame ! " said the manager. " Your large jewel-case is gone." He raised his hands and dropped them in a gesture of finality. Mr. Reynolds said nothing, watched them all, and made copious notes.

" So ! " said the Baron, perfectly composed, and nodded, as if to himself. " Tell me, then ! "

" The maid, Constance, took the great case away at ten minutes to four." A servant entered and handed

a slip of paper to the manager. "Yes, at ten minutes to four—three-fifty," he repeated. "Here is the receipt." He dismissed the servant.

The Baroness glanced warily at the detective. The scene was photographed upon her memory. She saw the faces of the minor witnesses, the chambermaid gripping the sides of her chair in the corner, distended eyes, the buttoned lift-boy, still whistling between his teeth, absorbing the situation with quick, precocious brain, the doctor and the stolid commissionaire, the detective writing in his book.

That drove her suddenly to rage.

"You need not think," she cried to Reynolds, "that Constance has taken the jewels. If she did take the case it is all right. I know——" she turned, sobbing, from the detective's impassive face, and clutched her husband's arm.

"Yes, that is so, my Rosa!" he said, coolly, and soothed her.

"Well," said Giusti. "Well, what now?" He looked pointedly at the detective, who ignored him for a moment.

"Now!" Reynolds got up and spoke cheerily. "I shall want you, and you"—he pointed to the hotel-clerk and commissionaire—"but you can go now. You two can go"—the chambermaid and lift-boy—"thank you, sir!" Reynolds bowed to the doctor. "We shall want you again, please." He raised his voice. "And you must not talk—understand, all of you!" He spoke to the hotel manager as they all crowded out. "See that they are about when I send for them," he ordered, "if you please." The manager followed his flock.

Mr. Reynolds was left alone with the Baron and Baroness.

"Now, sir, Mr. Holt knew of the existence of these jewels, of course?"

"Yes, of course," replied the Baroness, missing the point. But the question angered the Baron.

"What have you found out?" he cried. "You have wasted an hour—yes—and you talk of my nephew David——"

The detective held up his hand. "You have not followed the evidence, sir," he said, amiably. "Listen—and please do not interrupt." He gazed at the two for a moment before he began to speak. He was a man of wide experience, and he wanted to come to a conclusion about the Giustis.

"We find," said Mr. Reynolds, "that your maid, Constance, was murdered in her bedroom this afternoon between half-past-four and five. We find that your jewel-case had been stolen. The last man known to have entered your suite was Mr. David Holt, your nephew. Please be quiet! He was in your suite within a few minutes of the time the murder was committed. He left the hotel in such a hurry that he forgot his raincoat. He knew of the jewels, and he knew that you were out!" Reynolds paused. "Very probably all this means nothing at all," he added. "But that is how a simple man would regard the case. We shall find out the truth."

He did not listen to their expostulations, but opened a drawer of the table in front of him, and glanced inside. A ghastly relic was there—a glove, bloodstained and wrinkled. He did not show this to the Giustis. Mr. Reynolds murmured gently to himself.

"Now if that glove belongs to you, Mr. Holt——" he mused and smiled a little.

The telephone bell rang sharply, and made them all jump.

A voice began to rattle the instrument even as Reynolds put the receiver to his ear.

"Who is that, please?" asked the detective sharply, interrupting the speaker.

"Oh, Mr. Holt . . . no, not now . . . there's been an accident, a very sad accident, to Baron Giusti's maid. . . ."

"Yes," said Reynolds. The Baroness exclaimed, "It is David!" and the detective frowned at her.

"We should be glad if you could come round to the Russe at once, Mr. Holt!" said Reynolds.

There was a pause.

"Oh, hello, Peake!" said the detective. "Yes, bring him round." In a moment he hung up the receiver. He did not speak to the Giustis at once, but gazed reflectively at the table. Suddenly he laughed aloud. He called in the plain-clothes man from the hall, and whispered earnestly to him for a minute. "Upstairs—when I ring—not before!" they heard him say at the door.

"Mr. Holt will be here in a few minutes!" announced Mr. Reynolds. They waited in silence.

CHAPTER XXV.

At last they heard a quick step in the hall, David's high note of interrogation—"Here?"—and the door opened. David came in, a dark, attractive young man in pleasant grey tweeds, and went straight to his aunt.

"Aunt Rosalie!" he said. "Poor old Aunt Rosalie!" He held both her hands.

"David!"

The young man released himself, and shook hands with the Baron. "By Gad, sir!" he exclaimed. "Tell me about it—is Constance dead? Good God, I only——"

The Baron nodded and explained briefly. David heard him in shocked silence. The Baroness caught at David's arm.

"Yes, David, yes!" she cried. "And they think——"

She was interrupted by the detective, who had been very interested in the scene.

"They think nothing!" he said definitely. "And they know nothing. Glad to see you, Mr. Holt; perhaps you'll be able to throw some light on this very distressing affair. My name is Reynolds." He finished his own introduction.

"I'm afraid I can't help you much," said David, looking directly at him for the first time. Reynolds was much impressed with the pleasant manner and steady open gaze of the man.

"I only saw Constance for about a minute, you see——"

"I know, I know, Mr. Holt!" Reynolds replied, and continued with simple candour. "You're the last person known to have been in the suite before the tragedy, you see, so you're an interesting witness. I shall ask you all sorts of irrelevant question——" he smiled at Holt in a friendly manner—"but please don't mind. Sometimes one is able to pick up a thread or an idea from a man who knows the situation, even if that man has no knowledge of the actual occurrence."

The Baron and Baroness shifted uncomfortably in their chairs. They felt instinctively that the detective was like some huge, malevolent spider, bent on ensnaring their unsuspecting young nephew. And every decent, frank reply of David's confirmed then in their unconscious belief.

"I will do all I can, of course," said David, quietly.

"Good." The detective watched the young man narrowly. Then he said: "The Baron's jewels have been stolen!"

"Good—Lord!" said David in a hushed voice. He looked at his uncle, almost shyly. "I say—not the whole lot, uncle?"

"The big case, David. True, the necklace is insured, but——" he clapped his hands lightly and expressively. "But that is of no matter. It is not the jewels we want, but the murderer of Constance." He stood up, bulkily impressive, and pointed directly at Reynolds. "It is the murderer of Constance we want," he repeated. He looked hostile.

"Nonsense!" said the detective, impatiently. "You want them both. We come to straighten out your troubles, and if you don't actually conceal things from us, you treat us with active suspicion. People are really absurd, you know!"

The Baroness looked up at him with interest. It was

an entirely new point of view. But he shouldn't have talked like that about David. She wanted to tell David ; but how could she—with that man in the room ?

" Now, Mr. Holt ! " said Reynolds, and rubbed his hands briskly. " What time did you enter the hotel—as exact as you can, please ? "

" I'm not quite sure——" began David. The detective shook his head sadly.

" What a pity ! " he said.

" Well," David said, " I was upstairs about two minutes, and I think I heard it strike half-past four as I came downstairs. I must have come in about twenty-six or twenty-seven minutes past. That's pretty exact."

" Excellent ! " said Reynolds. " Now you came in and went straight upstairs, I suppose ? "

" Yes," David answered. " Not quite, though. I asked the hotel-clerk, I remember, if my aunt and uncle were in."

" And he said ? "

" He said he didn't think so, and was going to telephone, but I told him I'd go up. I——" David hesitated, and looked a little confused. The Baroness smiled at him and nodded encouragingly. The detective waited.

" Well, as a matter of fact," David explained, " I wanted to borrow some money from my people, because I'd left my pocket book at home and I wanted a few shillings."

" Of course," said Reynolds. " Perfectly natural. But "—he frowned slightly as if thinking hard—" surely if your people weren't in it was no good going up, so you might as well have let the clerk telephone ? " His frown vanished as he raised his face to David, as if in perfect confidence that David could explain this silly little point. David could.

"Damn it!" said David, and grinned ruefully. "Excuse me, Aunt Rosa. Well, if you must know I thought that Constance would be up there anyway, and I could get a few shillings from her if my aunt was out. You see, I was in rather a hole—I had a lady——"

"Of course," interrupted Reynolds. "I quite understand. I suppose it was quite a natural thing to do—I mean"—Reynolds seemed awkward—"I mean you were on that kind of terms with the maid——"

"I've known her since I was ten years old," replied David, simply. The suggestion of a smile faded from his face, and he looked wretched. The Baron and Baroness looked wretched too.

"Ah!" said the detective. "Yes, of course." He included them all in his frank glance as he looked up from his notes. "I know how very sad it all is. You must understand, please, that I won't harrow your feelings unnecessarily. I won't ask any useless questions." He appealed to them all.

"Now, Mr. Holt, please tell us what passed from the time you left the hotel-clerk."

"Certainly," said David. "I went upstairs at once and walked down the corridor to my uncle's rooms and banged on the sitting-room door and went in. There was nobody there, and then I heard Constance's door open—it opens on to the passage—so I went out into the corridor again and talked to Constance through the crack of the door. She wouldn't let me in because she was dressing."

"Otherwise you would have gone into her bedroom?" asked Reynolds.

"Yes, of course," said David, surprised. "She told me that my uncle and aunt would be back about six, and that they were going to Brighton, but she wasn't sure about the train. She'd telephoned, but hadn't

got through. Constance always hated the telephone, didn't she, uncle? So then I said I'd go to Victoria on my way home, and find out and telephone to them, and then meet them at the station. Then I asked her to lend me ten shillings because I hadn't any money with me, and she gave it to me through the door."

"What did she say to that?"

"I don't know," said David, looking worried. "She said something vague about my spending too much money—you know!"

"You had done that before then—borrowed money?"

"Not for some years," said David, embarrassed. "When I was at school I borrowed five shillings from Constance sometimes." He looked guiltily at his uncle and aunt. "But I always paid her back."

The Baron and Baroness nearly laughed aloud, they loved their nephew so much. Reynolds nodded.

"And when she had given you the money you went away?"

David frowned a little and replied shortly.

"Yes."

"Now can you tell me why you required this money so urgently, Mr. Holt?"

"Yes, I can tell you," said David, unpleasantly, "but I do not in the least see why I should. Why should I? Unless, of course, you suspect me of the murder?"

"My dear Mr. Holt!" deprecated Mr. Reynolds. He was about to enter into a lengthy explanation of his question when the manager came in and sidled up to his elbow.

"Your men have finished the scrutiny," whispered the manager. "They can go up, yes?" He indicated the others with his eyebrows.

"Yes, certainly." answered Reynolds, relieved. "We will all go up, I think."

The hotel manager approached the Baron and Baroness and bowed politely.

"Monsieur—madame!" he announced. "Your suite is ready." He paused. "But, if madame and monsieur desire, another suite has been prepared, and is also ready for their occupation. We are honoured to supply madame with a maid, whom she will find acceptable. Monsieur will allow us to do everything. . . . ?"

He faltered, but his anxious pleading face conquered the Baron.

"Yes, we will stay, my friend!" said Giusti. "But —the new suite, I think."

"I must ask you to do one more painful thing," said the detective suddenly. "And that is to accompany me to suite No. 327. I shall not detain you long. And you, Mr. Holt, please."

The Baroness winced, but the Baron shrugged his shoulders slightly and took her arm. David followed, and they all went upstairs. Reynolds, left alone in the room, took something from the drawer of the table, and put it gingerly into his pocket. Then he hastened to join his party.

David heard his voice at his elbow as they walked down the familiar corridor.

"Now, Mr. Holt," said Reynolds, "when you came up here before, did you see any possibly suspicious character about—did you see anybody at all? Think for a minute!"

The young man considered. "No," he said. "No. I didn't see a soul up here in this end, but I saw a man in the other corridor—leading the other way from the lift there." He turned and pointed. "But, Lord, I believe the fellow went into one of those rooms."

"Ah, well—no matter," said the detective.

Two clever young men stood outside the suite and waited for their chief. One of them had a camera, with large and intricate apparatus. They had reports to make, and Reynolds paused as he joined them. The Baron and Baroness and David went on into the sitting-room.

"Sit down, Aunt Rosalie," said David and pushed a chair to the window. They were all very quiet.

"I am very tired, my David." The Baroness sank into the chair. "And very anxious. My David——"

This time the Baron interrupted her.

"Come, David," he said heavily. "Come with me to the room." Morbid curiosity drove him. He took the young man by the arm, and led him through the small room where their meals had been served. The door into Constance's bedroom, usually locked, stood open, and they passed into the scene of the crime.

"Oh, my God!" said the Baron. "Oh, my God! It is not possible!" He spoke in a low voice, looking about him with dull eyes. His hand was on David's shoulder. David said nothing.

The hotel bedroom looked normal, yet there was a strange oddness in the atmosphere. The chairs, reserved and inarticulate, stood in neat, discomfort in their places, with some added quality of icy restraint. The furniture looked as if it knew wickedness, like all hotel furniture. On the carpet, between the table and the door, a shining wet splash showed where inexpert hurried washing had been done. The Baron started and breathed heavily at that, and pointed with shaking fingers. David could not help reconstructing the scene. Constance was standing there against the table; Frank's frightened eyes looked at him; David was rather white. That dark mahogany wardrobe must have

watched it all. Somebody or something had seen it; it was known. Undoubtedly it was known. David breathed hard, and turned, and saw the detective watching him from the open door.

"Let's get out of here, uncle," said David, without attempting to conceal his horror of the room. "This place is not good for you, and I'm sure it's not good for me." He shuddered, and pulled the Baron away. As he passed the detective, David looked into the man's eyes and shook his head slightly, as if certain of Mr. Reynolds' complete comprehension of his distaste.

Reynolds nodded. "It's funny, you know," he said when they were back in the sitting-room, "but I never feel that horror which people talk about, that sense of something fearful about the scene of a crime. On the contrary, rather, I feel as if the place itself had a conscience, and a good conscience, and that all the furniture or walls or whatever's there are trying to tell me all about it. This sounds silly, I know, but I've often got a good idea of how a thing's been done by simply sitting still in the place and trying to absorb it all. Suddenly you get an inspiration, you know."

David stretched himself, ending with a tremendous shudder of distaste. "You fellows must get some queer impressions in your adventures," he remarked. "By Gad, all I know is it makes me feel——" He shook his head, at a loss for a word.

The detective stood with his back to the window and watched the others.

"You know," he said meditatively, "the criminal may have been in this suite all the time. In that room over there, perhaps." He pointed to the Baroness' bedroom. The Baroness nearly fainted with terror. "He would be alarmed at your entrance, Mr. Holt, and he'd hide, you see. All the doors were unlocked.

Then when you'd gone, he went into the maid's bedroom, took her by surprise, and——" He opened and shut his hands expressively.

"It is an idea!" exclaimed the Baron. "And it does lend the colour, as you say, to the suggestion that the criminal—the murderer—shall have taken the rain-coat of my nephew to conceal himself."

David was startled; it was the first he had heard of the rain-coat. Reynolds was annoyed, for he had been working up to a dramatic conclusion and the Baron had spoilt it. No suggestion had been made about the rain-coat; obviously Giusti had been thinking about it and had decided that David must have left it in the sitting-room. Hurriedly he took charge.

"Ah, yes!" he said. "Where is your rain-coat, Mr. Holt?"

David looked bewildered. "By Gad, I don't know," he replied. "I'm shot if I know. Lord, I believe I did leave it here; first I've thought about it." He considered with a puzzled face. "No, I don't remember carrying it after I went out—I believe I did leave it here. How damn silly—but how in Heaven's name have you found out anything about it?"

"Oh, the doorkeeper saw you coming in with it, and he saw you going out without it! That's all the mystery," said the detective. He crossed the room and sat down at the head of the table. A bell-push was beneath his hand. David stood at the other end of the table.

"Then you cannot tell us anything about the rain-coat, Mr. Holt?" he said sharply.

"No," David answered. "I don't know where it is. Probably at home." He looked defiantly at the detective.

"No, it is not at your home," said Reynolds with finality. David did not question that.

"Then I left it here. I chucked it on to that chair, I know—and I suppose I forgot to pick it up. Somebody's walked off with it."

The detective did not answer. The air was electric, very suddenly. The Baroness clutched her husband's arm; and they stared, fascinated, at the table in the middle of the gloomy room, and the two hostile men facing each other across it.

Reynolds put his hand into his pocket and tossed something into the middle of the table. It was a wrinkled, bloodstained glove; David regarded it with horror.

"Is that your glove, Mr. Holt?" asked Reynolds, quietly.

David leant forward across the table, one hand on the edge, eyes fixed on the glove.

"No," he said, slowly. "Lord, no! I don't think so. Why should it be?" Reynolds pressed the bell. There was silence in the room.

In a moment his subordinate entered, the man he had spoken to before David's arrival, bearing a paper, which he handed to his chief. He remained standing beside the table.

"I have a warrant for your arrest, Mr. Holt," said Reynolds. He lowered his voice and murmured something that the others did not catch—"murder of Constance Wells."

David straightened himself sharply, and then stared at the detective with slow distaste.

"Perfect rot!" he said. "And why the devil couldn't you have said so before?"

The subordinates took him away, while Mr. Reynolds assured the Baron and Baroness that it was merely a formality.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOPHIE clutched her newspaper and read, twice and thrice, the report of the inquest upon Constance Wells. She was very nervous and unhappy, for her tea-party with David was mentioned, and she had no idea what to do. Several years ago—too many for Sophie to contemplate—she had practised and acquired the art of conquest as a prattlesome, cuddlesome, ingenuous, golden-haired baby, and she had been so successful, and the manner had become so natural, that now the poor girl had practically no brains left at all. The helpless pose is insidiously destructive, and Sophie reaped her crop. To entangle her further, a lawyer's letter lay beside her pretty breakfast service requesting her to visit a dry and frightening address in Lincoln's Inn.

She read the report again, and the names of the Baron and his wife clung to her memory. She imagined them to be kind people, and each moment the necessity for somebody to tell her what to do became more insistent. There was no David to advise her. She overcame her innate awe of David's relatives and went, desperately, to her telephone to call up the Hôtel Russe. Even then she quavered, and baited the exchange by taking down the receiver and hanging it up again several times without speaking.

But when she had taken the plunge she found companions in misfortune, and her burden was miraculously lightened by the fact. She had the good fortune to secure the Baroness at once.

"My name is Sophie Carmichael, and I am a very

great friend of Mr. David Holt. Perhaps he has spoken of me ? " said the girl, hopefully.

No, he had not spoken of her, but the Baroness would be very pleased to talk to any friend of David's, but not over the telephone. Would Miss Carmichael come round to the hotel at once ?

Miss Carmichael would, and did, and was received very kindly. She had dressed herself for the occasion, very quietly and demurely, and the Baroness was charmed. " Such a nice friend for David ! " thought the Baroness. When it became clear that Miss Carmichael was the friend whom David had taken to tea on that dreadful afternoon, the Baroness welcomed her with all the warmth her kind heart could spare.

First they said how terrible it all was, and looked at each other and were silent. Then the Baroness said that she loved David, and Sophie said that she did too ; and after that they fell to recounting the various emotions they had suffered—like two women talking across a baby's perambulator. Finally, Sophie explained herself, very discreetly, leaving much to a sympathetic imagination, until the Baron came in. He looked much older, and his clothes seemed loose about his fatness, but he was delighted with her pretty face and manner. He realized her importance as a witness and wanted to know what she had to say, and brought her to the point quickly enough. After knowing and considering the Baron for years as an amiable fusser, one understood at odd moments how he came to be a successful financier.

" He left you, then, in the tea-room at about twenty minutes past four ? " inquired the Baron.

" It must have been about then," Sophie answered anxiously, staring into his face with troubled blue eyes. " Yes, because he was back at half-past four."

" It is so important, you see, my dear little one, that he shall be proved to have been away a few minutes only. But you must tell me, exactly, without thinking of that." The Baron knew David was innocent, of course, but also he knew how easily a good lawyer can spoil a good witness.

" Why ! " exclaimed Sophie brightly. " It must have been later than twenty minutes past four when he went to the hotel because we only got there at a quarter past, and we talked—oh, for quite a long time—before he found he had no money with him."

" The tea-room you mean at a quarter past four ? " Sophie's grammar confused the Baron.

" Yes, that's what I said."

" Then he must have been away only five minutes ! " cried the Baroness.

Her husband nodded. He turned in his chair to face Sophie, nursed his round stomach with his clasped hands, and gazed deliberately at the girl.

" It is so ! " he said, finally.

" Yes," cried Sophie, eagerly. " Yes, of course. He couldn't possibly have had time to——" the poor Baroness shuddered in her chair, and Giusti held up his fat hand.

" You will tell them that on Friday, yes ? " he said.

" Besides," continued the girl, jumping up from her chair, " he told me about borrowing ten shillings from her, and he told me——" she stopped, realizing the implication. But the Baron was inexorable.

" He told you—yes ? "

" Oh, he just told me her name and he said he liked her, but that was just to tease me." Sophie blushed charmingly, a trick she had, but as Aunt Rosalie had already decided to marry off David and Sophie no harm was done.

" He did say that after he came back ? "

Sophie nodded vigorously and smiled at the Baroness. If Aunt Rosa had ever possessed a suspicion of David, it would have been dispelled now. In her psychology no man could have said such a thing after such a deed.

" And you will tell them—all that—on the Friday, yes ? " said the Baron.

" But I couldn't tell them that," Sophie said, " and I shall be frightened." Her modesty became her, but the Baron ceased to regard her seriously after that remark.

" Then it is that you do not understand the danger ! " he shouted terrifyingly, and rose to his feet. " Listen ! "

Sophie cowered.

" Dino ! " said the Baroness, sharply.

" Wait, Rosalie ! " he commanded, and fixed his eyes on the girl.

" You do not understand," he said, impressively. " David, our nephew David, is in danger of his life. A murder is committed . . . David is there at the time . . . he is the last man seen at the spot . . . valuable jewels are stolen . . . David is a poor man. . . ." the Baron emphasized each point by tapping his forefinger on his opposite palm ; he raised his voice with each sentence—" David knew of the jewels—and—and—the police wish some one to suffer, and it is right that some one should suffer." He dropped his voice at the last, and then paused.

" But Dino ! "

" Silence, Rosalie ! And why should he not steal the jewels ? We know David, all of us—we know the truth —but it is not we who try David ! They will not understand why David should not steal the jewels ! "

" It is true, Dino," said the Baroness, quietly. Sophie said nothing.

"It is true—yes," Giusti turned to the girl again and spoke gently. "You see the danger, and you will tell everything? They will love you for it, not laugh—and it is nothing to say!"

"Oh, I will tell them everything!" cried Sophie, in a gust of words.

"We have lost our friend," said the Baron, slowly, "We have lost our money. Shall we lose our so-loved nephew too?"

Sophie clung weeping to his arm, but the Baroness, sound woman, sat still and loved her husband simply.

"Now you will go, my little one," said the Baron, after a time. "And you will come again to see us—to-day is Tuesday—you will come Thursday, yes?"

Sophie said her good-byes prettily, and went away, leaving the Baron to shake his head over the weakness of women in general, and important witnesses in particular. But they both liked the girl and were charmed by her prettiness.

Sophie, somewhat cheered, but struck once more with loneliness, went to David's place of detention, and endeavoured to persuade a bored official to allow her in to see the young man. But her pleading and her lies were all of no avail, and she walked home, disconsolate, to sit miserably and dream of David pacing his cell, or declaring his innocence before stony-hearted judges.

David, himself, sat on the side of his quite comfortable bed, and sought to regard the whole affair from a detached point of view. This was difficult, but he managed it. Most probably, he considered, the detectives were convinced of his guilt, but unless they knew a great deal more than he suspected, he could not see how they could make a clear case against him. David was frightened, quite frightened, of some dramatic

piece of evidence produced by the Crown at a critical moment, some grotesque manufactured statement, monstrous and absurd, to confuse people's minds and upset the even tenour of his defence. The kind of thing impossible to foresee—the thing dreaded by the truly reasonable man. It will be noted that David did not wholly trust his devil. He was frightened, too, of seeing Frank's bewildered white face among the witnesses. That, of course, would settle the thing; he could throw up his hands. Supposing Frank wrote to him, too, against his instructions, and the police opened the letter! It was rather devilish to be at the mercy of an irresponsible mind like Frank's. He could think of fifty ways by which Frank could upset the whole business. Damn Frank! But still, the boy had been very easy to manage. Amazing youth, thought David, who could undergo such practice and preparation without ever envisaging the end to which he was bent. Frank—"Oh, damn—*tant pis, tant pis*!" said David, and he stuck out his long legs in front of him, and drummed his heels upon the floor. It was this infernal ignorance of what was going on outside which worried him.

So the day passed, and the next day, which was Wednesday. David got more than the usual amount of exercise, but he was very bored indeed. On Thursday the lawyer came again, instructed by the Baron; a grey, youngish man, with a sound reputation and annoying little elderly habits. He harried David's self-control by telling him to hope for the best.

"It's by no means settled yet," said the lawyer, patting his knees. "By no means settled yet, Mr. Holt."

"Of course it isn't," said David, eyeing him askance. But the man was cleverer than his speech.

"Just go over your movements on Saturday, Mr.

Holt. It's not quite clear yet. Tell me the whole story."

David stared at him. "Look here," he said firmly, "you've got to get me out of here the next time I come up before the magistrate. Call witnesses and all that kind of thing. I know it can be done. I've read it up."

"H'm," said the lawyer. "H'm. Most unusual—I may say, almost impossible in a serious case like this. The magistrate would have to refuse to commit you for trial—a thing that is rarely done."

"Certainly," David rejoined keenly. "I know. But when they haven't got a rag of real evidence against a fellow—all you've got to do is to point out that. Why, good Lord, just because I was there an hour before the thing was discovered, do they want to keep me locked up for months waiting for an absurd trial. It's damnable! Do they suppose that I nipped in and killed Constance and stole the jewels and hid them all in three minutes, and then went back to tea with Miss Carmichael?"

"Yes, that is what they do suppose," said the lawyer, calmly.

David was rather taken aback. "Yes, of course they do," he said, slowly. "What a fool I am. Obviously. But it is a bit silly, I think. Well, anyway," the young man continued. "You concentrate on getting me out of here. I'm sure it can be done. They have nothing but the fact that I was there about half-past four, and that's all. It's not enough, you know."

"I'll think about it," said the lawyer. "It may spoil——"

"It won't spoil anything," David exclaimed impetuously. "You can do it. Will you?" He looked frankly into the other man's face.

"Oh, yes, I'll try!" The lawyer was a little annoyed. "Now tell me the whole story."

"I'll tell you what I did on Saturday," replied David. "There's no story to tell you."

"Well, well. What about Saturday morning, now?"

"Saturday morning I wrote some letters, and went out for a walk, I think, until lunch time. I came back to lunch."

"Yes, Mr. Holt; and after lunch?"

"I think I read a magazine after lunch. No, first I telephoned to the Hôtel Russe to find out when my aunt and uncle were leaving London. They weren't in. I had to tell them whether I was going down to Brighton with them or not."

"Yes, I understand all that. Now about Miss Carmichael—I've had a long talk with her."

"I read and lazed until about half-past three, I think, and then I went out to meet her. I walked to the Strand. I always walk when I can."

"Tell me, Mr. Holt, why did you choose to take Miss Carmichael to tea at a tea-room in the Strand? It was not your usual custom, I take it? I only ask because the point may be mentioned later."

"Lord, no!" said David. "We went there because it was close to the hotel, and because I wanted to go in after and see my uncle and aunt."

"But you didn't go in afterwards?"

"No, of course not. I met Miss Carmichael, and found I had no money with me, so I left her, very rudely, and went to the hotel to see if my people were in and to borrow some money. I thought I'd find out about Brighton, and get some money at the same time. I left my pocket book at home."

"Of course, of course," said the lawyer.

"Well, still my people weren't in, so I borrowed ten shillings from poor Constance."

"You knew her well?"

"I've known her since I was ten years old," replied David, simply.

The disarming statement had its usual effect.

"And you left Miss Carmichael——"

"I think about twenty-five minutes past four, and I was back just after half-past four. I only talked to Constance for half a minute, because I was keeping Miss Carmichael waiting."

"Exactly! Continue, please!"

"Well, we had tea, and then we walked down the Strand, and I left her at Charing Cross. Must have been about half-past five, then, I should think."

"What did you do then, Mr. Holt"

"I walked down Whitehall and along Victoria Street to the Army and Navy Stores, because I wanted to buy some things—some soft collars, as a matter of fact, to take away with me, but——"

"Yes?"

"It was an infernal bore, really, because I got there, and waited round for ages, and then found I had only the change of poor Constance's ten shillings, and I hadn't an account, so I came away cursing without my collars."

"Ah, I see!" said the lawyer.

"I got home about a quarter past six—oh, first I went into Victoria Station and looked up the Brighton trains. I was telephoning about that to the Russe when they came and picked me up."

"Ah! Can anyone identify you at the Stores as having been there at that time?"

"No. You see I didn't buy anything. Will it matter, do you suppose? I don't know at all who——"

"No, I'm sure it doesn't matter, Mr. Holt."

The lawyer got up briskly and pocketed his papers, and then gazed at David, deliberately. "There's nothing else, Mr. Holt, you would like to tell me?"

"I think that's all," said David, looking surprised.

"Oh, about the rain-coat! You have nothing more to add to your first statement?"

"No," David replied. "I know I had it when I started off to tea, and I remember throwing it on the chair in the sitting-room. I can't think of anything else. I don't remember it after that. Lord knows where it's got to!"

"And the glove, of course, is not yours?"

"Dammit!" said David, irritably. "I only saw it for half a minute, or less. It might have been in my rain-coat pocket. But no, I'd swear it wasn't mine. It was new, for one thing, I'm almost sure, and I've only got a couple of very ancient pairs. No—not my glove!" He spoke with finality.

The lawyer hesitated.

"I must see you again, you know. I shall have one or two more questions, Mr. Holt—very little questions."

"Of course," David said. "My dear man, you can't ask too many if it's going to get me out of this hole!"

They shook hands.

"I say," whispered the lawyer, leaning forward confidentially. "Why did you take that rain-coat into the hotel at all? You were going to rejoin Miss Carmichael in a minute or two—why didn't you leave the coat in the tea-shop?"

"I'm sure I don't know," David replied. He looked into his counsel's face and shook his head. "I've tried to think. It was on the chair beside me and my hat was on top of it, and I picked 'em both up and nipped off to the hotel: I didn't think——"

"No," said the lawyer. "No." He stared at his neat black boots and tapped them with his umbrella. "I think your idea may be sound, Mr. Holt. We'll try to get you out. The prosecution will have several very awkward little questions, but they will probably be reserved until the trial. We shall be expected to reserve our defence, you see. But in the meantime we may manage to—er—to—er—so to speak—avoid them!"

He frowned thoughtfully, and moved to the door, still pondering. But before the door shut, David heard voices outside in the corridor, and in a moment the lawyer looked in again.

"Magistrate's hearing to-morrow," he announced, and smiled and nodded. "So I'll be in again later."

"Oh, thanks very much," said David.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE great bare room was singularly uninspiring, David thought. Odd people came in and took their places with much clattering of boots on bare boards. Officials shuffled papers ; David saw faces that he knew among the witnesses. Then Sophie appeared, rather scared, with his uncle and aunt. All three of them were subdued but seemed very friendly, which amused David. They all sat in a pew with the other witnesses and stared anxiously at David, and at the two policemen beside the boxed-in reading desk at which he stood.

There was no sign of Frank, for which David blessed kind fate. He saw the hotel clerk, a commissionaire, a pretty girl who looked like a housemaid (David wondered who she was) and several others whom he could not recognize. They might be saving up Frank to settle the affair with a bang ; David shivered and grinned with his lips set, for he feared that. He hoped that the police would not take much trouble over this present formality. The magistrate entered, everybody standing—a clever old gentleman with keen eyes and a distinguished head. He reminded the prisoner of Frank's father, somewhat idealized, and David watched him with interest and much mental speculation, for here was a man—so his lawyer had told him—who was a fanatic on the question of the liberty of the individual. David considered that you could not have too much of that.

Instantly the counsel for the prosecution began his statement of the case. He gave the bald facts of the murder, its discovery by Mary Bennett, the chamber-

maid, the prompt notification of the police, the arrest of David—taking little trouble to elaborate the affair. He went on to say that Mr. David Holt was the last person known to enter the Baron's suite before the discovery of the crime, and that he proposed to bring forward sufficient evidence to justify the committal of the prisoner for trial at the next assizes. His short trenchant sentences shocked the court into vibrant life, and every one was sitting forward and listening intently when Mary Bennett was called.

But she had nothing to say beyond the dramatic story of her discovery of the body, and the prosecutor, perfectly confident in the attainment of his object, which was simply the committal for trial, did not make much of the facts of her relations with the murdered woman before the crime. This was passed over with brief mention of their friendship. Mary stated that Constance had a young man, and caused a sensation in the court. But as she had only known the murdered woman for a month, and as Constance's young man had never been described to her, nor had she ever seen him, her evidence proved vague and sterile. She went back, trembling and half crying, to her seat.

The lift-boy, in his clear, impudent voice, told of his part in the matter, and was told to stand down, with a compliment on his presence of mind. The hotel manager, also, was dismissed very briefly. He was obviously harassed by a question or two about his method of safeguarding valuables entrusted to the hotel safe, but he escaped with honour.

After him appeared the hotel doctor, who gave brief evidence as to the body and his examination. He would give no suggestion as to the actual moment of the murder. Baron Giusti filled the witness box.

With an air of repressed force, he explained Constance's late situation in his household. He testified to her long employment, and to the confidential manner in which she was regarded. He flatly denied Mary Bennett's statement. Constance had no love affairs, he said, and no troubles that he was aware of. With regard to the jewel-case, Constance was implicitly trusted, and—at this point the magistrate and the prosecutor were quite unable to stem his torrent of words—she had taken the case upstairs simply to have things ready for her mistress' departure to Brighton. There was to be no doubt about that, the Baron affirmed. He drew breath and gazed defiantly about him, then nodded assuringly to his anxious wife. He bridled.

"Now, sir," said the prosecutor, quite timidly, "who, in London—besides your bankers, possibly, and hotel servants of course—who knew of the existence of your jewel-cases and the manner in which you safeguarded them?"

"My family!" replied the Baron.

"Of course, of course. Had you spoken of them to friends, visitors?"

"It is possible," said the Baron, cautiously. "But I do not think."

"Your secretary, perhaps. He would know, of course?"

"It is that I have no secretary." The Baron was triumphant. "I was to offer that position to my nephew, Mr. David Holt." He looked round at David.

"Mr. Holt knew all about it then," pursued the lawyer.

"He is my nephew," announced the Baron, haughtily. He had no idea how quite unimportant that point was in an English court of law.

" Mr. Holt, then, was the only young man of your acquaintance who knew of the jewels and that your maid was trusted with them ? " The Baron opened his mouth as if to protest and the lawyer added smoothly —" so far as you know ? "

The question had to be repeated.

" It is so," said Giusti, grudgingly.

" Now, sir, please answer me this. Was your nephew in comfortable circumstances, well provided with this world's goods, or—er—was he what is known as ' hard up ' ? "

" No ! " said the Baron.

" He had plenty of money and supported himself ? "

" Yes."

" You did not give him money at times ? "

" No."

The prosecutor hesitated and referred to the paper in his hand.

" But you gave him a cheque for a hundred pounds in April, Baron Giusti, did you not ? "

The Baron was amazed. He opened his mouth wide.

" It is so," he acknowledged, and bent his head. " I had forgot it. It was that my nephew was ill."

" I see, I see," said the lawyer quickly. " A helping hand on occasion. I quite understand." He changed the subject at once, having made his point, and asked the Baron about the reason for David Holt's telephone message and visit to the hotel on Saturday, which Giusti explained satisfactorily. They were all going to Brighton together.

" Thank you, Baron Giusti," said the lawyer. The Baron returned to his seat, conscious that his efforts to shield David had left an unfortunate impression on the court.

Then the hotel-clerk appeared. David, who had been attempting with complete lack of success to gain some indication of the magistrate's mind from his expression of quiet interest, gave it up and watched the clerk shrewdly. The prosecutor smoothed his typewritten sheets, and compared evidence.

There were no new developments from the hotel-clerk, however. He told the same story of David's telephone message early in the afternoon, and his subsequent arrival at the hotel. Under pressure from the prosecutor, the witness rather regretfully swore that Mr. Holt's conversation with him, prior to the young man's visit to the suite, had taken place before half-past four. This was very satisfactory to David. He said he did not know when Mr. Holt had left the hotel. One gentleman, a Mr. Dallas, a guest at the hotel, had come forward to say that he had seen Mr. Holt leaving the hotel. And the commissionaire had seen him. The old soldier took his place in the witness box, and went through the preliminaries with complacent leisure. With a stub of pencil and an envelope he had written down the answers to the leading questions, and he had conned them so thoroughly during the hearing that he was in no doubt of his own story. He stood at ease, and surveyed the court and prosecutor with calm pride.

"What time did Mr. Holt enter the hotel?" asked the prosecutor.

With sound technique the commissionaire came to attention.

"Four twenty-six, sir," he replied.

"You are very exact," said the lawyer, looking at the man over his glasses, rather doubtfully. David smiled.

"Yessir!" said the commissionaire.

"Did he appear to be in a hurry when he passed you? Take your time—there's no hurry!"

The question put the soldier out of his stride. It had come in the wrong place. He cast back vaguely.

"No, sir, I don't think so, particularly," he said. "Well, he was brisk, too, and he knew where he was going, you know." He scratched his head.

"I see," said the lawyer, understanding him. "Now, was he carrying anything?"

"Only his coat, sir—a rain-coat."

"Nothing else, at all?"

"No, sir!"

"And when did you see him again?"

"Four-thirty, sir."

The prosecutor took off his glasses, surveyed the witness, and put them on again.

"And what was he carrying then?"

"Nothing, sir."

"He had left his rain-coat behind?"

"Yes, sir."

"And he seemed in a hurry?"

"Yes, sir."

"What did you do, when you noticed Mr. Holt no longer carried his coat?"

"I called after him, sir, but he didn't hear me."

"Would you say that he had not desired to hear you, or rather—do you think he heard you but didn't want to come back?"

Here the magistrate interposed, and refused to allow the question, thereby saving the commissionaire a great deal of worry; he had not thought of that. He was permitted to go. The prosecutor smiled gently; sometimes, in a case like this, he forgot the absence of a jury. Turning suddenly, he presented his summary

of the proceedings and formally requested the magistrate to commit the prisoner for trial.

But David's counsel was on his feet and exciting attention.

"Well?" asked the magistrate, waiving his reply to the prosecutor.

"I ask for the immediate discharge of the prisoner, your worship, on the ground that insufficient evidence has been produced by the prosecution to justify his committal for trial."

There was a solemn hush in the court.

"Ah," said the magistrate, with interest. "Do you propose to prove an alibi?"

"That would be my defence, your worship, had the medical evidence stated the exact moment of the crime, but under the circumstances it is impossible."

"Quite!" said the magistrate. "Go on, then. Make your case!" He looked at his watch, and sighed audibly. It was a quarter past three.

David's counsel, Mr. Holden, settled the preliminaries and the prisoner was called to the witness box. A stately procession, of David and his body-guard, moved across the room. The prisoner was sworn. He nodded easily to his friends among the witnesses, and leant against the front of the box and looked sedately at the magistrate.

"Now, Mr. Holt," said the lawyer, "will you give us an account of your movements on Saturday?"

"I will," said David, and did so, very clearly, telling the same story as he had told the lawyer on the previous day. The magistrate glanced at him keenly several times, and he stepped down feeling pleased with himself.

"One moment!" said the magistrate, and David returned to the witness box. "Er—how long had you known this poor woman—what were your relations

with her exactly? Was she an old family servant?"

"My aunt's maid," David replied, and looked steadily into his questioner's eyes. "I've known her since I was ten years old," he added, simply. "Years ago, when I used to stay with my uncle and aunt, Constance used to see that I had my bath." David smiled faintly and then looked very sad. The Baroness sobbed audibly.

"I see," said the magistrate. "Thank you." David returned to the dock.

"Now," said Holden, shuffling the papers in his hands, "to corroborate my client's statement, I propose to call further witnesses. Miss Carmichael!"

Sophie was called and appeared in the box, pretty and plaintive. She testified to the appointed meeting in the tea-shop, and told of David's hurried departure to obtain funds.

"And how long was he away?" asked the lawyer, when she hesitated.

"Oh, not more than five minutes!" Sophie assured him.

"Sure?"

"Quite sure!"

"Good. And how did Mr. Holt behave when he returned?"

The girl had to consider this.

"He was just the same," she said, looking puzzled.

"I see. What did he say?"

"Oh, he said that his uncle and aunt were not in the hotel so he had had to borrow ten shillings from the maid."

"Anything else? Think, now!"

Sophie looked round despairingly and caught Giusti's eye.

"He said her name was Constance and that it was

a pretty name and that he liked her very much—but he only said it to make me angry ! ”

At this point the Baron surprised every one by clapping his hands loudly, and was warned to be silent. But the point was well and truly made. At that moment it seemed absurd to suggest that a young man could make such remarks after murdering the very woman he was talking about. The lawyer rubbed it in.

“ He teased you about the maid, in fact, as a young man might ? ”

Sophie flushed, looked tearful, and said nothing, and the lawyer smiled at her benignly without pressing the question.

“ Very pretty ! ” said the prosecutor quite audibly to no one in particular.

Holden smiled and continued his questioning. Sophie said that they were together “ a long time ” after that, and that after tea they strolled down the crowded Strand to Charing Cross, where David had left her. He said he had lots of things to do because he was going to Brighton that evening with his uncle and aunt.

“ What time was it when he left you ? ”

“ I think it was about half-past five,” replied the girl, after consideration.

“ Now tell me, Miss Carmichael, tell me if at any time Mr. Holt showed the least excitement or worry, or sign of trouble, during this hour from half-past four to half-past five. Think about your answer. Or did he seem at all excited when he met you ? Was his behaviour at all unusual at any time ? ”

“ No ! ” Sophie replied instantly and emphatically. “ He was just ordinary,” she said.

“ Thank you, Miss Carmichael. That is all.” Sophie

returned to her seat, to have her arm patted by the Baron and her hand clasped by the Baroness. Her evidence had been of the greatest importance.

Mr. Dallas, a guest of the Hôtel Russe, said that he had seen Mr. David Holt pass through the hotel hall on his way to the door. Mr. Holt seemed perfectly composed, had acknowledged his nod, and was not in any way flurried, though he was walking quickly. It was half-past four, Mr. Dallas said, because he had looked at his watch a minute or two earlier. He was waiting for his wife to join him at tea. He had met Mr. Holt at dinner some months before, and remembered his face.

The commissionaire, who was regarded with suspicion by the court on account of his bewildering accuracy, was called again to the witness box, and questioned briefly.

"You are quite sure that Mr. Holt had left his rain-coat behind?"

"Yessir."

"You saw him clearly? Could he have carried it so that you might not have noticed it?"

"No, sir!" said the commissionaire, smartly.

"Now, was Mr. Holt carrying anything at all?"

"No, sir. Except his walking stick."

"Could he have carried a black leather case nearly a foot square, without you noticing it?" The lawyer shaped the box in the air with his hands.

"Lord, no, sir!" The commissionaire was pained.

"Thank you. Now could anyone else have carried out a case like that without your noticing it?"

The old soldier was dubious over this. "Well, sir, they might have," he said. "There's a lot of small luggage carried out, you know——"

"But Mr. Holt didn't carry anything?"

"No, sir. I saw him. I know Mr. Holt."

"All right, thank you. That's all."

Now Mr. Holden brought out a dramatic piece of evidence. Thomas Bliss was called, and a worn, elderly man entered the witness box. Mr. Bliss stated that he was an ironmonger in a small way in Fetter Lane, and that a young man had purchased a hammer from him some three weeks ago, he wasn't sure of the date. He had identified the hammer as the one with which the murder had been committed. He had used it in the shop before selling it. He was unable to describe the young fellow who bought the hammer, as he had been busy, and the bargain had only taken a moment. The gentleman was young—very young—and fair, Mr. Bliss thought. He had come in, asked the price of the hammer, given him three-and-six, and taken it away. Mr. Holden checked his garrulity.

"Look at this man carefully," he said, indicating David. "Was this the man who bought the hammer?"

"Lord, no!" said Mr. Bliss. "Never set eyes on him before."

"You're sure?" Mr. Bliss nodded.

"Well, would you recognize the young man who bought the hammer if you saw him again?"

Mr. Bliss affirmed that he would.

"All right, thank you."

The hotel manager was recalled, and, in answer to a question, stated that every room in the hotel had been searched, as Mr. Reynolds, the detective, had suggested that the criminal might have hidden the stolen jewel case in an unoccupied bedroom before leaving the hotel. The case was not in the hotel. David's counsel turned to the magistrate.

"Your worship!" he began. "No evidence has been produced by the prosecution to prove that my

client had any connexion with the crime. This makes my task more difficult, for usually it is easier to rebut a definite statement than to destroy an implication. The charge is based upon two pieces of evidence, one circumstantial, and the other a pure implication. The first consists of the fact that the body of a murdered woman was discovered in an hotel suite between five and five-fifteen p.m. on Saturday, and that my client, Mr. David Holt, visited the suite, his own uncle and aunt's abode, by the way, some three-quarters of an hour earlier on the same day, and that he was the last man known to have visited the suite. The second lies in the fact that my client entered the hotel carrying a rain-coat, and left the hotel without one, the obvious implication being that he was so flurried by the crime that he forgot it on his departure. That is all. It is light material upon which to try a man for his life. It is not sufficient."

He coughed, and looked about him with an air of complete self-satisfaction.

"Now it appears that my client was having tea with Miss Carmichael, an old friend, on Saturday afternoon. Had the medical evidence stated the approximate moment of the crime, Miss Carmichael's evidence would have proved a complete alibi. As it is, we have ascertained that Mr. Holt was absent from her for five minutes only between the hours of four-fifteen and five-thirty. This was his visit to the hotel, already explained by Miss Carmichael. He wished to obtain some money from his relatives, having left his pocket book at home. Now, part of these five minutes was naturally occupied in walking to and from the hotel. Also he spoke to the hotel clerk for a moment or two —an appreciable moment. My client says that he was upstairs for half a minute only, speaking to the woman,

Constance Wells. If we multiply his conjecture by three, giving him three times half a minute, it allows a minute and a half for the murder, the disposal of the jewel case and his departure. That is absurd. In my opinion Miss Carmichael's evidence proves an alibi."

He paused for a moment, to allow his statement time to sink in.

"But, before I leave this point, I must refer to the jewel-case, the reasonable motive for the crime. It is clear that the case was not carried out of the hotel by Mr. Holt. Perhaps he had concealed it! But, as we have heard, the case was not in the hotel an hour after the crime, when a thorough search was made. Mr. Holt did not enter the hotel again until he was taken there by the police. What possible connexion can my client have had with the jewel-case?"

"Now about the rain-coat. My client was naturally in a hurry to get back to Miss Carmichael, whom he had left rather unceremoniously. He went into the sitting-room, put down his coat on a chair, heard the maid's door open, and went out into the passage again to talk with her. When he had got the few shillings he required, what was more natural than that he should hurry back to the tea-room? He forgot the rain-coat. Since this affair of the coat is all implication, I must be allowed to imply, too. And it seems to me most unlikely that a murderer would forget his rain-coat. It is too big. And it had a name inside, had it not?" He looked across at David, who nodded. "Yes, the name was inside. No, it seems very unlikely. A man with the intelligence to dispose of a large jewel-case, to spirit it into the unknown, apparently, would not have left his rain-coat behind. A glove, perhaps, or a handkerchief, or an incriminating fragment of some

kind. But not a rain-coat. In fact, a glove was left behind. But unhappily for the case of the Crown, it was not my client's glove. The prosecution suggests that a murderer forgot his rain-coat, with his name inside. I suggest that my client, not considering his visit to the suite very seriously, left it behind because he was in a hurry. The affair is inconclusive, because neither the police nor Mr. Holt know where the coat is now. Possibly it is beneath a cushion in the chair where Mr. Holt threw it. I have known things like that."

He turned directly to the magistrate.

"Your worship," he said, "my client has been locked up in prison for a week, and in that time the police have been unable to bring forward any evidence even to justify his arrest. I ask for his immediate discharge!"

David saw Reynolds whispering to a policeman. Except for the detective the whole court was rigid with breathless interest. The magistrate looked forward over the benches, his face inscrutable, his eyes unseeing. Suddenly he spoke.

"The evidence submitted by the prosecution does not justify the committal of the prisoner for trial on a charge of murder." He spoke slowly. "The prisoner is discharged!" He stood up.

David heard Sophie burst into tears, and he looked round for his uncle. But he had gone. He looked uncertainly about him, and then, wonder of wonders, one of the policemen opened the gate of the dock, and gestured politely. He was free. He stepped down slowly. Aunt Rosalie greeted him, also in tears. David gathered that his uncle had had to go off to a business appointment. His aunt was to telephone to him; she went off hurriedly to acquaint her husband

with the good news. David was not excited, for he was certain, convinced, that something else was going to happen. He was certain of it.

And he was right. It was done simply and without the least fuss. Reynolds met him at the door and arrested him on a charge of theft.

"You see, Mr. Holt," he said, apologetically. "You see, we feel certain you did it." He bubbled over with expansive friendliness as he led David towards the bench. "I've tried every hotel employé, and they're as innocent as I am. Really, if we can keep you in our hands a little longer, a few days, something's bound to happen which will clear the matter up. Somebody or something will turn up. It always does, you know. Wells's young man, perhaps. We'll find out who he is."

"You're quite mad," said David. "I didn't do it, you know! Why ever should I?"

In a moment they stood before the magistrate again, while Reynolds made formal application for a warrant. If anything David was less annoyed than the magistrate, for his counsel plucked at his sleeve behind him and nodded reassuringly. David clasped his hand and shook it warmly. The magistrate spoke.

"Very well," he said, drily. "If you do not have sounder basis for this charge when the prisoner appears again the case will be dismissed, and the prisoner will be well advised to take proper action."

He hesitated, and fumbled with documents.

"I shall grant bail," he said sharply, "in two sureties of £500. Pending bail——"

He signed the papers and David was hurried away, not particularly disturbed. "Get hold of my uncle!" he said to Holden and the lawyer nodded. David was back in his cell in ten minutes. He remembered that he had not thanked Sophie and was sorry. This final

act had been so hurried. He waited, unperturbed, sure of the rapid transaction of the matter of bail, and supremely confident in his lawyer. It was interesting to go over the case; he appreciated the sheep-like quality of the witnesses in the question of the exact time of his visit to the hotel; but this matter of Constance's young man worried him.

Half an hour passed—an hour. David cursed bitterly, for now it was too late for his release that night. Then he heard steps in the corridor and jumped to his feet. Mr. and Mrs. Champion appeared at his door. David thought they were still in Norway.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

PANIC, mad panic, assailed David's brain. He drove it from him resolutely, but for a moment he could scarcely think. He foresaw complete and utter ruin, death on the gallows, a thousand things. In a brief fraction of time he imagined the Champions arriving at Codnor, their dismay at Frank's appearance, Frank himself, half mad, wholly unstrung, blurting out his pitiful story to his bewildered parents. They would not understand for a time, and then—then Champion's common sense would find enlightment. A flood of light would expose every nook and cranny of the whole ghastly affair; he saw friendship turned to hate—the old man's furious desire for revenge—the end of it. David bit his lip.

His smile was a little bleak and fixed, but the two kind people saw no change in him beyond the natural result of horror at the crime and worry as to its outcome. There were warm greetings and inquiries as to Frank.

"Ah, yes, poor old Frank!" he said. "You must be careful with him. I shouldn't talk much about it all——" David said vague things, clutching at straws which he knew to be straws; Frank would pour out his tale at the first kind word. The Champions nodded in agreement.

"I say," said David eagerly, "Couldn't you hurry up this bail of mine, sir? By Gad—if only you could! Then perhaps they'd let me out at once and we could all go down together—if you'll have me. I want your quiet house badly myself."

He grinned apologetically, and they protested that they wanted him.

"But, David," Mrs. Champion said, "I think we really must go down at once. We should have gone on to-night, only I was so ill on the boat and in the train, too. Poor Frank will be so miserable down there by himself, and he does get very nervous, you know. He's much more highly strung than people think."

"Of course," said David, simply. "I'm so sorry you've been so ill and worried." He felt that if only he could see Frank first, for a moment, he might be able to avert disaster. He did not know what to do.

"Would you mind seeing what you could do about that bail?" he asked old Champion. "If you can't do anything yourself, if it's too late, would you mind sending a note by special messenger to Baron Giusti at the Russe, saying that I want him to pull every wire he can?"

Mr. Champion promised. "You see how it was, my boy," he said. "We got to Bergen and they told us the fishing was poor—these damnable mines and submarines have done an incalculable amount of harm—so we drove out to see the Neilssens—perhaps you remember them at Codnor—one of the younger boys, Alner, I think, was at school with you and Francis——"

"Such nice people, David!" said Mrs. Champion. "You'd love them."

"Well," continued old Champion, "to make a long story short, they put us up and persuaded us to stay. Sent for our traps from Bergen and all that. He had a river at the back of the house, said there were salmon trout, but I saw nothing of them. Well, no, I can hardly say that. On Tuesday afternoon, David, I raised——"

"We heard the dreadful news of your arrest on Wednesday morning, David," Mrs. Champion interrupted. She had been watching David's face.

"Oh, yes, yes!" said her husband. "Neilssen gets the Observer." He pulled his face into gloomy lines and lowered his voice. "We read about the awful business and arranged to come back at once, of course. Neilssen very kindly drove us in, and no time was lost. Newcastle this morning."

He paused.

"Look here, sir," David said, earnestly. "Will you go out now and root out the highest official in the place, and find out about this bail business?"

"Yes, go on, Francis!" added Mrs. Champion.

Old Champion departed, and for five minutes the others discussed the probable effect of it all upon Frank.

David told her not to have any newspapers about, advised her to soothe him, and not to let him talk. All the time he knew it was useless nonsense; one cannot usefully suggest to a flooded river that it shall stay within bounds. Mrs. Champion talked all the time about Frank. They had telegraphed . . .

Her husband returned, unsuccessful. "Can't do anything," he said, apparently rather pleased at the impervious condition of the police officials. "Too late. Nobody here to give authority, and they've got to wait for the proper official, of course. Can't do things loosely in a place like this. That wouldn't do at all, and we mustn't expect it. But I'll send the note to your uncle, and my cheque too, when I find out how much they want, and they'll have you out of here before lunch to-morrow, my boy, so don't lose heart."

"Thanks very much," said David. "They'll want five hundred from you," he added, ruefully.

"I shall get it back, I hope!" cried old Champion, humorously, and clapped the young man on the shoulder. "I take it to be a formality."

"Unless I disappear," said David. "Then it ceases to be a formality. When are you going down to Codnor?"

"First thing to-morrow. Catch the nine-fifteen, and get down there at eleven-thirty."

"Ah!" said David. He wanted to kill the old fool, to kill him painfully, but he couldn't, because of the note to the Baron and the necessary cheque.

The Champions prepared to go; David helped Mrs. Champion with her wraps.

"We shall expect you as soon as possible, David," she said kindly, at the door. "For a long stay, till you've forgotten all about this horrible place. And mind you sleep well to-night now it's all over. You look so dreadfully tired and worried." She smiled at him.

"Come down at once, my boy," old Champion said, heartily, and then they went away.

David heard a rattling of bolts and locks in the corridor and shouted for the warder.

"I say, if that bail was settled for me at once, is there any chance of my getting out to-night?"

"Never heard of it at this hour, sir," replied the official, shaking his head. "Governor's gone. But you'll be fixed up all right enough in the morning."

"What time?"

"Might be out by ten," said the policeman, reflectively. "Sometimes he's been here at ten."

"Oh, thanks!" said David.

But he cursed, cursed bitterly, when the man had gone. To have done it all, and then to be floored by such a circumstance as the Champions' return. Black

disappointment settled on him like a cloud. He had not expected that ; he had counted on a week at least, alone with Frank in new places ; with new thoughts to control his mind and make the lad cleave more firmly to himself, David. But David was strong, and he knew he was strong, and he would fight to the end of it. He understood the play of evidence, the shadow caused by implication, the germ of conviction, like yeast, working and expanding in a man's mind. He would resist, and still resist, until he was crushed with damning proof, and then he would stand up gaily, laugh at them all, tell them how he had fooled them, and laugh again. And then he would take his punishment.

But it all came back to him again—the grim chance which had brought the Champions home. How he had juggled the fools ; and now the fools had undone him: So, it was their turn. His quick unscrupulous brain weaved alternatives, he studied violence, the death of Frank. Poor Frank! It all lay with Frank. There was no time. David paced his room in the darkness, for the light had been put out ; three long steps and a short one, and back again. It was a bad night, a wicked night ; David had never known a worse. He paced the floor and philosophized, laughing at himself, and always his brain flew off to conjure mighty schemes, and to discard them. So he tramped up and down in the night, and suddenly, in a brief space, he perceived the inside of every human mind and understood wisdom. He was wiser than the world : and then the moment passed, and left him clouded. He laughed again, threw it all on the knees of the gods, and went to bed, and slept.

* * * * *

"Hello, who's there?" said David, sitting up in bed. He heard a step in the corridor outside. Some official on his rounds, no doubt; it was still quite dark. He sat up and clasped his knees, and chuckled grimly at the momentary childish impulse to pull the blanket over his head and forget his troubles until they were forced upon him.

"Failed, by Gad—so I have!" murmured David. "Where was I?" He yawned hugely.

"Now if I point out to old Champion that so surely as he causes me to be punished, just so surely will he cause the hanging of his son—Ha!" David mused profoundly. "But that is not the point."

Indeed it was not the point to David. Failure was his punishment; anything the law could do was secondary. To David the law's punishment was no worse than the permanent loss of the kind of life he wished to lead; exposure before the Baron and Baroness, before the Champions, meant that that life was denied him. Nothing else would do; nothing else in the wide world would do. He had played a high game, and he would not descend to dangle threats before Frank's father to save his own skin. It was not worth it; David had never thought so. But the jewels were worth it.

Now, suppose he could silence old Champion by impressing upon him the inalienable connexion of himself and Frank—one down, both down—supposing he could make old Champion keep his knowledge to himself through his fear for his son, so that the Giustis remained confident in David's innocence, and so that he—David—retained the jewels! Ha—that might be a solution. Then he understood clearly that Champion, sound man, would not do it. Frank's father would not save his own flesh by becoming an accessory to a

crime. David believed that he would not. Queer people!

FAILURE! David saw it like that, in flaming letters as high as the sun, and his heart and brain were separate seething hells of fury and resentment. He, David Holt, dragged down by those bleating sheep, the Champions—these virginal people with machine-like brains . . . with their fishing and their Observers . . . Blast them! The young man lay back and laughed quietly at himself. His face was strong and quiet and friendly in the coming light. His brain took up the tale.

He saw the pride and pleasure on the face of the ineffable Reynolds. His lawyer's sorry disgusted face . . . perhaps that lawyer would not be surprised. David grinned at this. For some time there had been bustling, clanking of pails, splashing of water, in the corridor outside. David wondered how long they would let him lie abed when he was seriously in prison. He imagined things would be rather different.

David glanced at his watch. Half-past seven. The Champions would be getting up, leisurely and rather painfully, to catch that train at a quarter-past nine. They would talk drearily to each other as they dressed. He saw old Champion putting on his collar before the glass, chin up at an angle, trembling fingers at his throat, talking: "The whole country's thoroughly upset, my dear"—and he only thought so because he'd had to get up at half-past seven. God—to have his fortune resting in such feeble hands! Ah, to rip and tear and cut, and rid the world of such fools. David found himself shaking in his cot, and laughed pleasantly at himself. He must avoid these fits; they gave him a headache. He lay quiet for twenty minutes, and then began to dress.

No, it was finished. Well, he had always been able to take his medicine. Finished—that meant he was finished, he, David Holt. By God, he was not done yet! "My brain," said David, "my brain." His face was demoniac in a second. He would control them again as he had controlled them in the past—these inconsequent fools who muddled with things they could not understand. But no—he was helpless, ruined—ruined by feckless circumstance . . . "And the Champions. The Champions!" David shouted. He reeled against the wall.

The door opened, and the friendly official entered.

"Steady on, sir, steady on," he said, comfortably. "You're to come out. Gentleman outside, Baron Joosty—brought the Governor down. Your bail, I expect."

David gaped, and braced himself with a hand on his chair.

Then he laughed.

"What time is it?" he said, rather vaguely, and looked at his own watch.

"Well, that's all right," said David, and put on his coat. "Lead on, my friend, lead on."

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE long house was restful, full of quiet peace, in the evening light. You could see the shutters of the upper windows from the road—tall green shutters which lay back comfortably against the soft old white of the wall. Before the house ran a terrace of broad flagstones, cracked and ancient, with green moss filling every crack; a stone bench faced a lichened basin where water dribbled softly; roses scented the air about the brim. Then came the lawn, and at the end of it a grey, ivy-covered wall, not very high, and beyond that the road to the village. From the cross roads a hundred yards away came the pleasant music of the blacksmith's shop.

A dog-cart rattled down the road and pulled up smartly at the solid green gates. In a moment Frank came in, slowly, carrying his bag. The cart went off again, back to the village at a spanking pace, but the boy did not move. He put down his burden and surveyed his home, and suddenly he was happy.

There was the house, his home, and the terrace, and the great beech, and the friendly windows. It was all certain, very assured, full of tranquil peace; there was nothing wicked or grotesque about it. There was the clock over the stables—it was always wrong, for David and he had mended it in their day—and the cobbles in the yard. He could see the yard through the gate. This was all very good, very pleasant; he felt that the past was less important;

for a fraction of time he perceived his own past in relation to the past of this house. The air was full again of the melodious hammering. "Todd's working late!" said Frank to himself, and he gripped his bag and advanced. Suddenly it became dark in the garden, for the front door was opened wide, and Mrs. Pusey, the housekeeper, stood in the shaft of light and peered into the gathering dusk. He shouted cheerily.

"Well, Master Frank!" said the old lady instantly. "You do look ill!" Frank was astonished, for he was still some distance away, but he remembered his post-card, David's dictated postcard, and his stated need of rest. Perhaps she had brought in the local doctor to meet him; it would have been just like her. He shook hands and set down the bag in the hall.

"How are you, Mrs. Pusey?" he said. "I'm glad to be home."

"I feel myself slipping, Master Frank!" replied Mrs. Pusey, with interest. Presumably she referred to her hold upon life. "Another cruel winter is the last I shall see. When your father planted them roses out there I warned him I should never live to pluck them."

"I don't think he wants them picked," said Frank, absently. He reached for his bag. "Where's every-body?"

"Mrs. Champion has let them all go home, Master Frank. Edith comes every day to help me, and Mrs. Champion said she was to sleep in the house, but I let her go home at night. Lots of young people are afraid to sleep in a house when the master and mistress are away, in foreign parts, too, but Lord bless us, I don't care. I——"

"I see, Mrs. Pusey," said Frank, and went off upstairs to his room. The old lady continued her

remarks to herself in an undertone, dealing tersely with Frank's likeness to his grandfather, whom she had never seen, and concluding with a few brief indications of the foolhardiness of leaving home in general. Then she went to complete the preparation of the boy's dinner.

Frank went into his room and pushed the bag under the bed as far as it would go. He stood up straight and set his young jaw and declared to himself that that was the last of the grisly business. He wasn't going to be done in with it. That was all. Coming here had done him lots of good. She wasn't dead, of course, anyway. He fled to the bathroom to escape the whispering tongues in his ear and splashed noisily in cold water while the dinner gong boomed heavily in the hall. When he got downstairs he said that he had forgotten to kiss Mrs. Pusey, and insisted on repairing the omission instantly. So he had a very good dinner, and slept well that night.

Edith, the housemaid, awakened him in the morning and dissipated his matutinal misgivings by her prosaic actions. It was like coming home for the holidays; the sun shone gaily and Frank went down to the river for a bathe before breakfast. A dam, built two years ago when Frank reached a reasonable age, and a day's labour on the part of the gardeners, had achieved a fine deep bathing pool in the river; it was a jolly place, with bushes and good sound turf about it, and on one side a shingly bank down which it was pleasant to plunge into the water.

Frank lighted a cigarette and strolled in the sunshine up and down the terrace. He knew a place in the terrace where the moss between the stones formed the various shapes of the counties of England. He went round the angle of the old house and peered in at the

schoolroom window. There was the ink on the walls, and the old map of England all marked where he had traced out the counties, and the two hemispheres of the world joined together in that absurd atlas. In his earliest youth Frank had always associated the world with a pair of spectacles. He chuckled happily and turned away ; how jolly all this was. The fair promise of the day fulfilled itself.

It was Sunday. Mrs. Pusey and Edith were crossing the stable-yard. They were going off to church, three miles away, dressed in garments of throttled exuberance, and bearing prayer books, which they held against their bodies in a peculiar way—gripped firmly, with smug jealousy, between the thumb and the index finger. Frank had never noticed that before.

When they were gone, he roamed about the garden, until he discovered that he was lonely. It was the first stage of acute discomfort. Several times during the morning he had to run upstairs and just make sure that the bag had not been touched. Frank found it a bore, having to do that so often, but there was no help for it. Somebody easily might have followed him down from London, and simply be waiting till he was out of the way to go in and open the bag and discover everything. So of course he had to be careful. He broke off in the middle of lunch and crept upstairs very cautiously and quietly and flung open his bedroom door with a jerk, but there was no one there. Still, Frank knew there was a spy about, for the fellow was getting careless and beginning to betray his presence by odd creakings and sudden footsteps. Odd that neither of the maids saw him about the grounds ; he questioned them artfully, so that they never suspected anything. Frank did not sleep so well that night.

Monday was a bad day. He did not hear from David, which he had hoped to do, and not only that, he had had to race back from the river to get to his bedroom in time to keep that fellow from opening the bag. Frank was very annoyed about this, and after that occurrence he did not go very far from his room. It was all most infernally inconvenient, but he knew it was necessary. He posted the letter to his people telling them not to come home.

It was not until Wednesday afternoon that Frank realized the dreadful truth. There was no man spying upon him, watching for an opportunity to seize the case. There had been no man. The truth was much worse. The woman had followed him, the woman he had killed, for now he knew she was dead. Frank had been deceived by the creaking footsteps, the hastily closed doors. Now he knew. He had gone into his bedroom at dusk to change for dinner, on the alert, of course, as usual, but suspecting nothing, and then he had seen her. She was standing against his dressing table with her face turned from him, her shoulder raised—he knew the pose of her. It was just the same way as she had stood in the hotel bedroom. Then she had faded, simply faded into nothingness, as he caught the lintel of the door and supported himself, for no strength was left in his legs.

But, as he assured himself later, this was no time for weakness. He must face this terrible thing and protect the charge which Holt had placed upon him. This he decided at dinner, and he felt a great deal better for the resolution. Afterwards he sat in the window seat and stared out over the darkening garden. He had lost the feeling of peace; he knew it was all a sham, all hollow. The stately peace of his home could be split, rent, crumbled in a moment by any human

action. It was only pretence, this suggestion of unchanging tranquil solidity. There was no more comfort in assured things, for they were not really assured to him, Frank Champion. All that was for others, not for him. In the garden even the comfortable accustomed things of his childhood seemed thinner, misshapen, changed. It was dark, and he turned on every available light in the hall and dining-room, and made Edith bolt the shutters. But first he had to go upstairs to see that the bag was untouched.

In this quiet manner he made himself mad.

"I say, Mrs. Pusey!" said Frank, suddenly, "do you believe in ghosts?" He laughed in a silly way as he spoke, and as he put down his cup he rattled it helplessly upon the saucer. It was at breakfast on Friday. The boy had altered a great deal, and looked very ill. Even Mrs. Pusey thought he looked run down.

"Well, no, Master Frank," replied the old lady, thoughtfully, "though in my old mother's house, where there had been a murder, I used——" she put down the tray she was carrying, rested her hands on the edge of the table, and prepared for a long innings. But the boy could not bear that.

"No," he interrupted. "I mean, supposing you'd committed a murder——"

"Lord God!" exclaimed Mrs. Pusey, piously. "But now you come to say so, Master Frank, I do remember a queer thing about that house. I——"

"Would you be afraid of being haunted, Mrs. Pusey?" asked the lad.

"Well, as I was saying," continued the lady, "a funny old feller there was, had lived in that house for fifty years—well, perhaps nearer forty—it was '89 my mother died, and she'd had the house——"

Frank got up and walked out of the room, but she followed him to the hall in surprise, holding the tray pathetically.

"But your eggs, Master Frank!" she said, bewildered. Frank swore at her from the top of the stairs, and she went back to the kitchen, aching with hurt pride. "Well!" she said, "Well!" Edith had to soothe her.

The boy clung to the banisters and cursed her viciously, not knowing in the least what he was saying, for a moment or two after the old lady had indignantly rustled away. Then he wept, with his arm on the rail and his head on his elbow. He had had no sleep at all, poor boy, the night before, and for several nights he had not slept more than three hours.

And there had been no letter from Holt. Frank's face was bewildered and thinner, there were dark hollows beneath his eyes, and he had a way of peering nervously at people, instead of his old trusting and ingenuous gaze. But he never faltered in his idea of his duty to Holt. Sometimes he felt crushed by the cumulative effect of his experiences in London; his first loathsome beastliness, his subsequent misery, and Holt's kindness, then the affair at the hotel culminating in the woman's crushed head against his knee and that ghastly journey back to St. George's Square with everybody looking at him.

Holt must have meant that to happen, of course, that is, the last part of it. But supposing something had gone wrong, supposing he, Frank, had made a mistake, and Holt was in prison now because of it, and that was why he hadn't heard from the man. Perhaps

it was something to do with the case. My God, thought Frank, will all this never end? The obvious thought came next, of course—perhaps somebody had taken the case. He fled to his room to make sure.

The bag was there. Frank dragged it out into the middle of the floor and stared at it. Suddenly he had an impulse to look at the case, to hold it, to open it and make sure of these papers—just to be sure that they were there, so that all this misery had achieved something. The boy was still capable of queer spaces of complete sanity, and he was always working out the thread of it all—if only Holt had written or come or something!

He fumbled with his keys and opened the bag with difficulty. Everything was pitched out upon the floor. There was the case, in the cardboard box at the bottom of the bag, tied up with string. Frank jerked at the string, then grabbed his pocket knife. He cut his finger and scattered more blood over the clothes upon the floor. Now here was the case with the papers—a black leather case. It opened with a spring, quite easily.

"Oh, my God!" Frank whimpered. "Oh, my God, it's all wrong. It's the wrong thing——" Diamonds winked at him from tiny shelves, a great rope of pearls lay in detached majesty upon a velvet tray. "Oh, God!" said Frank, and breathed deeply. He was bitterly disappointed. He wrote a letter to Holt:

"DEAR HOLT,

"We have made an awful mistake. That case is full of necklaces and rings and things, and the papers are not there. I know you told me not to open it, and I am sorry, but I thought something might be wrong, and it is lucky I did, for otherwise we should

never have found out for ages. It is full of rings and all sorts of things. I wish you would come down, because really I do not know what to do, so come down if you can. We must have got the wrong case from the hotel. Apart from that everything is very quiet down here. Perhaps you left the papers at St. George's Square in my room. I have looked for the papers in the trunk but they are not there, only necklaces and things to wear in the case. I am rather bored, so hope you will come down. I have not seen a newspaper, so I do not know what has happened in London, and Mrs. Pusey does not read them.

"Yours sincerely,
"F. C. L. C."

Frank read this over and added a postscript.

"P.S. It is pretty rotten down here so come when you can. I know I ought not to have opened it but it's lucky I did."

He found an envelope and addressed it. Of course he had not a stamp. He went downstairs, leaving everything tumbled about on the floor of his room. Mrs. Pusey was dusting.

"I say, Mrs. Pusey," said Frank. "Will you put a stamp on this and give it to the postman, please, when he comes?" He handed her the letter.

"Certainly, sir!" replied the old lady. She was very dignified and distant, and thrust the envelope into the pocket of her apron. She made no comment, oddly enough, which Frank ought to have noticed. Frank was quite unconscious of her strained manner and went upstairs to his room again.

There was blood on his dressing-table and blood-stained clothes upon the floor. The jewel-case stood there upon the table where he had put it. In his imagination the room was like the bedroom at the Hotel Russe. He shut the door and cringed against it. He was mad, quite suddenly.

Frank saw Constance lying on the floor, where she had fallen after his blow. She had looked over his shoulder as he came up, looking at Holt. Wherever was Holt? He ought to be here now. Frank went down on his knees by the table and tried to gather the woman's head to his knees, but he couldn't—he couldn't touch it now. It moved about, it floated. It was bleeding now, bleeding all over him. Frank cried out sharply and sprang to his feet, and the sound of the gong in the hall called him to lunch. He threw the clothes, the rain-coat, the blood-stained coat and trousers back into the bag, and put the jewel-case on top. He left the bag unlocked and gaping widely at the foot of his bed, and went to wash.

The day wore on—a dreadful day. Frank spent much of the afternoon in the road leading to the village, for he thought that David might appear at any moment. He felt dazed and vague at times. Mrs. Pusey, still offended by his rudeness of the morning, did not have tea with him in her usual manner, and was still more offended when he did not appear to notice her absence. So there was no one to call Frank back, with ordinary accustomed words, from his haunted world of ghosts, and fearful misgivings, and sudden, sweating terrors. He relapsed into a state of nervous stricken horror, while the old housekeeper sat in the kitchen and repeated his misdeeds of the morning to the sympathetic housemaid.

It was a beautiful moonlight night, soft and warm.

Frank sat up in bed and waited, for he was afraid to lie down. He had found blood on the counterpane and blood on his pillow ; it was from his cut finger, of course, for he had put the case on the bed to open it, but he did not think of that. Little bits of 'Macbeth' came into his head, and he repeated them, and laughed at himself, and then shivered and shook with nervous attacks. He felt horrible, all stained with blood.

Then he heard a rustling and a creaking and his heart nearly stopped, and he thought he saw Constance at the foot of his bed bending over the jewel-case. She was just on the edge of the moonlight. He wanted to shout, but he knew he must not, for that would do in Holt, of course. But he had to get out of bed and go to her—he had to. When he reached the table she had gone, faded into the moonlight, but then he perceived that he actually was covered with blood. From his waist to his knees he was all dark stains. That was horrible! Frank knew that he must be clean at all costs—always he was wanting to be clean. He couldn't run the bath now—he would wake everybody up. There was the river, though. Often Holt and he had gone for a plunge in the moonlight. . . . Holt might be out there now. Frank left the house in his pyjamas, and went down through the moonlit garden towards the river.

He felt better now. Joy flooded his heart. The mystical soft light soothed him, and the smell of night-stock made the tears run down his cheeks. He was of a piece with this strangeness—he would be when he was clean. Holt would come in the morning and all would be well. One plunge, and back to bed. There was the river.

God's peace, God's holy peace, shone about him. That still moonlit water held all the peace in the world.

He felt filthy, unclean—he had been unclean since he went to London—David had ragged him. He would get clean now in that silvery light. Hands outstretched, Frank ran towards the mist, but he stumbled at the top of the slope, and fell, and struck his head on a stone at the water's edge.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE car ran perfectly. David left the Portsmouth road half a mile past Godalming and drove steadily, as fast as he dared. He was in good time so far; no trouble had developed to delay him, and there was little traffic. He was driving for his life.

The Champions were sitting comfortably in a first-class carriage. Old Champion would be reading the Morning Post, agreeing in his heart and resenting in his head. David considered them, skirted a huge wagon, and narrowly avoided charging into a flock of sheep. He had to suit his pace to the brutes and crawl through the feckless mass. Just like the Champions, thought David, driving deftly. Almost allegorical. They would naturally get in the way at the critical moment. An animal tottered in front of the car and paused helplessly. David pulled up with grinding brakes, and the sheep bleated pathetically. He was conscious of honeysuckle in the hedges on his left. The shepherd waved his hat and shouted, and with much effort they were all turned off down a lane. David glanced at his watch and drove on. Speed and white cottages; he went through a village with a rush and a scattering of chickens. It was a beautiful morning. The miles slipped beneath him. Beech woods lay ahead.

"Petworth, Chichester, Littlehampton, and Bognor." David turned to the left at the signpost, and put his foot on the accelerator. Who would go to Bognor, thought David—Sussex is full of corners, and damnable

corners—and why do buildings stick out arbitrarily into the road? Supposing the Champions had had an agony about Frank and had gone down earlier—last night. He pictured Frank, with his head in his mother's lap, telling everything between hysterical gulps. Old Champion would take bad news very well, probably. No chance to get round him.

Strange to think that the whole game lay in Frank's ineffectual hands. He was the key to it all. The police could do nothing without Frank. The charge of theft would be dropped at the next hearing—unless Frank were found. David wondered if he would be able to silence Frank—to silence the boy effectually. He wondered whether it was not bound to come out sooner or later. He had probably over-estimated his power over the boy. Perhaps if he had had the boy ready in the hotel, and had dealt with Constance himself—but he knew he could never have done it. No, the game was worth the candle, he thought, and he still believed in his influence over Frank. He drove on steadily, thinking of Frank. As Reynolds said, Frank was the something or somebody who held the key. It all rested with Frank. A perambulator, and a milk wagon, and a labourer on a bicycle—David flashed by, a roaring vision of dust and blue paint.

He began to love his uncle, whom he had injured so dreadfully. His uncle had got him the car, pouring out money like water, and he had asked no questions. "Rare fellow!" said David. A nasty bit of road here—too much metal. He had seen Sophie, scribbled a note to Aunt Rosalie, and assured his uncle of his urgent necessity to leave town at once. And the Baron had financed him, nodding his head, and asked no questions. A very good fellow indeed!

David looked at his watch; it was twenty minutes to

eleven. He passed a little flint church, and turned the car into a deep lane, with high hedges all dog-roses and blossom. Familiar ground now. He went through the village, Frank's village, passed the smithy, and drew up before the solid green gates. He had arrived; he wondered if the Champions had arrived too. But his purpose was too definite to leave any space in his mind for qualms. He had to see Frank, and deal with the boy—he had no idea exactly what to do, but he felt that the mastery of the situation still lay in his hands to make or mar. How very quiet everything was here! An ideal place for Frank and his nerves, surely.

David walked quickly up the path, and knocked. In a moment Mrs. Pusey opened the door.

"Morning, Mrs. Pusey!" said David, and smiled at her and shook hands. But the woman seemed bewildered.

"I thought it was the master," she said. "Yesterday——"

"Mr. and Mrs. Champion will arrive any minute," David interrupted. "I thought they'd be here already. Where's Frank?"

"Now, do you know, Mr. David," began the housekeeper, leading the way into the hall, "Mr. Frank never came down for breakfast. But Edith says his bed has been slept in; so I suppose he must have got up early and gone out for a walk. He's been very queer, Mr. David. And his father and mother coming home, too! But his bed's been slept in, so he's not gone far. He'll be about somewhere—he's been very queer, Mr. David." She nodded her grey head and pursed her lips.

"You're sure he's not in the house, Mrs. Pusey?" David said, shortly.

"Oh, no, sir, he's not in the house," she said. "Master Frank's not in the house, Mr. David." She

spoke as if the idea was absurd, as if Frank never entered a house under any circumstances.

She wondered whether to tell him how very badly Frank had behaved.

"I'll look in the garden," said David, and turned away. His brain was reeling; the boy Frank had lost his nerve. He had not arranged for this; it was all wrong. The boy had gone.

"Frank!" he shouted. "Frank!" He plunged through the shrubs and ranged the paths at the back of the house. "Frank!" There was the wicket-gate leading down to the river. "I'll go down there later," David decided. "Frank!" he yelled. The calm quiet of the place seemed to mock him; in ten minutes he returned to the house. There was no sign of the boy, but the Champions had not arrived, thank Heaven. Mrs. Pusey met him in the hall.

"Now, Mr. David," she said, "I had a letter——" She stopped.

"Is that a puzzle?" asked David, quietly. His manner was not so light as his words, and he frightened her. She pulled an envelope from the pocket of her apron and played with it in her hand.

"When the postman came," she said, "I was upstairs getting the mistress' room ready and Edith——"

"Is that letter for me?' said David, his voice hard and brutal. "Give it to me!"

She handed him the letter without further speech. The poor woman was frightened. It was Frank's letter which she had forgotten to post, and she thought he was angry because of the neglect, so she tried to justify herself. David tore open the envelope and read Frank's piteous note. He pushed past her and raced upstairs to Frank's room, leaving the housekeeper babbling about the

postman. David knew the house perfectly, of course. The large bag he had locked in Frank's room in London gaped open now at the foot of the bed. A black leather case lay in the top of the bag, partly concealed by a pair of grey trousers covered between knee and waist with dark stains. The bed was made; the housemaid must have been in the room. David was beside himself with fury and dismay. But he had no time to consider the possibilities which lay in that direction. He put his hand to his head and tried to think. Frank had lost his nerve, clearly enough. The boy was probably on his way to town to find David. Some one would pick him up at Ebury Street, babbling and insane, and that would finish the matter. Things were happening too rapidly; they were not allowing enough time for meals and sleep. He pulled himself together and grinned ruefully, with his eyes half closed. He felt dead with fatigue; but he must conquer that.

"God, what a man!" said David, thinking of Frank. Now should he go up to town and see if the boy was at the flat? He pulled the garments from the bag, placed the jewel-case in the bottom, and jammed the blood-stained clothes on top. Then he closed the bag and locked it with the key he had kept. He had not known of Frank's key. As he did so, he heard through the open window the sound of a cart drawing up outside in the road. That was the Champions. He carried the bag into the room next door, the room he always had when he stayed at Codnor, and pushed it far under the bed. Then he ran downstairs to meet the boy's father and mother. Perhaps Frank was with them. They might have picked him up at the station.

Mr. and Mrs. Champion entered the hall, the ubiquitous Mrs. Pusey fussing about them. Frank was not with them. David descended the stairs with a run

and came forward, both hands outstretched. His brain was cool again now, like ice.

"Hello!" he cried. "Hello, sir!" He shook hands. "Thanks to your efforts I got out this morning, and drove down at once to thank you and to see Frank." He beamed.

"Why David!" said Mrs. Champion. "I am so glad! That was your car, then, outside. We did wonder who had come."

"Better open the gates and bring it on to the drive," said old Champion, stamping about the hall as if it were winter time. "George will open the gates for you. Better get that done, David!"

"Where's Frank?" Mrs. Champion asked.

"Safe enough there, sir, for now," David replied. "No motor thieves in Codnor." He turned to Mrs. Champion. "I don't know where he is," he said. "I thought perhaps he'd gone to meet you." They all turned and stared accusingly at Mrs. Pusey, who fluttered.

"I don't know where Master Frank is," she said. "His bed's been slept in. I expect he's gone out for a walk. He's been very queer—he hasn't had any breakfast. Mr. Frank, ma'am——" she quavered and was silent.

"Oh, he's about the place somewhere," David put in. "Gone to sleep in the sun. Look here, you rest for a time, and I'll go out and find him and bring him in. He's sure to be about somewhere."

"Not in the least tired, David," said Mrs. Champion. "Would you like to rest a bit, Francis?" She looked at her husband.

"No—no!" he exclaimed, briskly. "We'll all go out and find Frank. "Come on! Come on!" He stamped out into the garden. David and the lady

followed him, her arm in his. She spoke gently of her pleasure, and Frank's pleasure, and her husband's pleasure, because David was free again. They caught up Mr. Champion at the old fountain.

"They have done well, Francis!" she exclaimed, and they all stood about the brim for a moment staring at the roses.

"The Zephyrines are not so bad," said the old man. He bent down and turned up a petal or two. "Ah——" he said. "Look! when I put those in I knew it was not the place for them!"

He shook his head and regarded the rose-bushes with profound consideration. David had passed on and they were suddenly startled by his shout of "Frank!" fifty yards away. The two elderly people sauntered on gently, making mild comments about the flowers. There was no sign of Frank. In a few minutes they found David standing at the wicket-gate smoking a cigarette.

"I think we'll go down to the river," he said. "Frank's had a swim, of course, and then gone to sleep in the sunshine. I know him—lazy little beggar."

They all laughed. He held the gate open for Mrs. Champion, and they strolled down through the meadow, Mrs. Champion in the middle, holding an arm of each of the men.

"You haven't told David how glad you are to see him out of that horrid place——" she chided her husband.

"Very glad, of course, very glad." Old Champion looked about him and sniffed the air. "Perfectly absurd to lock him up at all. Very absurd, too, to leave home at this time of year," he added, irrelevantly. He nudged his wife. "Eh?" he asked. "Eh?"

"It is delightful to be home," she agreed. And in a

moment she added: "And Frank will be so pleased. And the trouble is all finished. You must stay for a long time, David." She smiled at him. They passed through the bushes leading to the river.

"I don't know how long——" David began awkwardly, staring at the ground, but suddenly he felt the woman's arm dragging in his. "Francis!" she said, and sobbed—"Oh, Francis!"

Frank lay on the slope of the bathing-pool, his head half in the pool, a little cloud of red in the water about his ear.

"Get back, Eve—get back!" Champion cried querulously, and was down the bank at once, with a flying of turf and a great splash. He was beside Frank before David.

They pulled the boy up the slope, both of them speechless. Champion took his hand from Frank's chest.

"He's dead," he said quietly. Then louder—"He's dead, David!" The old man rose, his knees trembling. David nodded. Eve was on her knees beside her son, with the two men standing silently above her. The water was running down Champion's trousers. The trouble was finished. David had won. No one could find out anything, now Frank was dead. The game was his. All this passed through David's mind as he stood there in the sunshine. The woman fell forward suddenly across the body.

As the two men bent down to help her, she regained her control.

"Everything seemed to go round suddenly," she said, vaguely, and stood up, holding her husband's sleeve.

"Stay here, sir, I'll get some help," David whispered, and went off through the bushes. The two old people did not move until he returned. "But there was only

Frank," Mrs. Champion said, her eyes wide and dismayed.

A gardener and a stable boy lifted the body, and they moved through the meadow towards the house. Mr. and Mrs. Champion followed close, the woman holding Frank's hand. David came last, pensively, thinking about it all. He would have to wait a year at least . . .

Printed by Jarrold & Sons, Ltd., Norwich, England

Messrs. Hutchinson & Co.

are pleased to give the following particulars of many important New Books for the Autumn, 1920, and also a splendid list of New Novels, which, as will be seen by the undermentioned names, are almost all by the Leading Authors.

STEPHEN McKENNA
KATHYLN RHODES
H. DE VERE STACPOOLE
C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON
RIDER HAGGARD
GILBERT FRANKAU
ANTHONY HOPE
MARY WEBB
PIERRE BENOIT
RAFAEL SABATINI
E. F. BENSON
MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES
R. W. CAMPBELL
LOUISE JORDAN MILN
E. NESBIT
NORMA LORIMER
MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK and CROSBIE GARSTIN
MARGARET BAILLIE SAUNDERS
DOROTA FLATAU
MABEL BARNES-GRUNDY
ANTHONY LUDOVICI
ROBIN RICHARDS
DIANA PATRICK
MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS
FUTABATEI
HAROLD MACGRATH
ISABEL C. CLARKE
PEGGY WEBLING
TALBOT MUNDY
CURTIS YORKE
G. B. BURGIN
M. MORGAN GIBBON
MRS. WILFRID WARD

Hutchinson's New Novels. 8/6 Net

"She" Meets Allan — By RIDER HAGGARD

Author of "She," "King Solomon's Mines," etc.

Another fine story of adventure and daring deeds in the hidden heart of Africa. Allan Quatermain, whose exploits have been eagerly followed by thousands of readers all over the world, makes a journey into the Interior to try to learn the mysteries of life and death from the lovely lips of the immortal She, and with Umslopogaas and Hans, companions of his former travels, has many stirring adventures on the way. But there is more than mere adventure in Sir Rider Haggard's latest book, for beneath the clash of arms and the roar of wild beasts there is a deep psychological significance for all who are able to see beneath the surface of things. It is one of the finest things he has done.

The Dummy Hand

By C. N. and A. M. WILLIAMSON

Authors of "The Lightning Conductor," etc.

The fascinating and beautiful Marise Sorel, a famous American actress, fell in love with Lord Severance, but circumstances forced her into a sudden and dramatic marriage with John Garth, a powerful and original man of her own people, and the most amazing consequences follow swiftly one upon the other.

This is a sensational and intriguing story, full of movement and with a strong human appeal. It is equal to anything we have ever had from these gifted and popular writers.

Uncle Jeremy — By G. B. BURGIN

MR. BURGIN'S SIXTIETH NOVEL.

To celebrate the production of his sixtieth novel, one for every year of his life, Mr. G. B. Burgin has written "Uncle Jeremy," the scene of which is mainly laid in the little Canadian township of Moose Village. There the disgruntled hero, who has quarrelled with his fiancé, the purse-proud daughter of a soda-water millionaire, meets with a wealthy and cultured Indian family who are tired of the luxury of New York and re-visit the scenes of their childhood. The intrigue which follows, and the benevolent intervention of "Uncle Jeremy" when things go wrong, constitute a charming and exciting story, written with all the vigour and freshness of youth.

The Unknown Road — By CURTIS YORKE

Author of "Joyce," "The Level Track," etc.

In her new novel Curtis Yorke tells the story of a delightful girl earning her own living alone in London. Her temptations and problems are described with sympathy and insight, and the picture of life under present-day conditions in a great city is realistically presented. A vivid and thoroughly interesting story such as we always expect and invariably get from this popular novelist.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 8/6 Net

Seeds of Enchantment By GILBERT FRANKAU

Author of "Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant," etc.

The scene of Gilbert Frankau's latest novel is laid in that mysterious, still unexplored country of Indo-China, 1,000 miles from the sea. Here he gives us the adventures of a party of white men who travelled into the Interior in search of a magic bean which brings happiness to all who eat it, and was said to be in the sole possession of a secret French colony, descendants of some early settlers.

Writing with the same vivid realism that made Peter Jackson the success of its season, Mr. Frankau opens up a new territory for fiction, and takes his readers right into the steamy, tangled jungles with their buried cities, or up on to the cool and delicious hills where the Daughters of Enchantment entertain the explorers. This is a fine, stirring novel which will be greatly appreciated by all who like to read of Adventure and Romance in a world very different from the one in which most of us have to live.

The House in Dormer Forest By MARY WEBB

Author of "Gone to Earth," and "The Golden Arrow."

A powerful drama of life in the last century, in which Love, Beauty, and Romance and the tragedy of an inevitable fate are depicted with the clever, distinctive touch which has placed Mary Webb among the foremost of our modern authors. She writes of ordinary people, plunged unthinkingly into an extraordinary maze of destiny; and of quiet, uneventful lives which crash unexpectedly into tremendous depths of suffering, or soar radiantly to passionate heights of joy. This is a book which stands alone in its lofty idealism and the primitive grandeur of its conception; it deals with the fundamental instincts of humanity and has a great deal more before it than the ephemeral successes of most modern fiction.

The Queen of Atlantis By PIERRE BENOIT

Author of "Count Philip," etc.

In the heart of the Great Sahara, two French officers, Morhange and Saint-Avit, discover a hidden city, the last stronghold of the long-lost Kingdom of Atlantis, where Queen Antinea, a ghoulish but beautiful woman, rules her subjects with terrible ferocity. Rejecting her love, Morhange suffers cruelly at her hands, and the ghastly hall in which the mummified remains of her former victims are stored is the scene of a gruesome tragedy, Saint-Avit, escaping across the desert, alone surviving to tell the tale.

Pierre Benoit is hailed in France as a second Rider Haggard, and this novel, which was crowned by the French Academy as the best of its year, has already sold over 100,000 copies.

The *Times* Literary Supplement, in a review running to a column and a half, says: "There is romance, there is excitement, there is love. It is an absorbing story . . . and one that will be particularly interesting to English readers."

Hutchinson's New Novels. 8/6 Net

Lady Trent's Daughter By ISABEL C. CLARKE

Author of "The Elstones," "Julian," etc.

Olave Trent, brought up in the absence of her mother by her aunt in an old-fashioned house and on old-fashioned lines, falls in love with Guy Quinn, a promising young writer who, unknown to her, is already engaged to her mother. Of the difficulties arising out of this unusual situation Miss Clarke has written a capital story, and the struggle between love and self-interest in the minds of the two women is poignantly portrayed.

The Roman Catholic faith, which is at first an obstacle to the lovers, becomes eventually the means of bringing them together, and this aspect of the book is treated with the sympathy and understanding which has already made Miss Clarke the acknowledged successor to the late Mgr. R. H. Benson.

Comedy Corner By PEGGY WEBLING

Author of "In Our Street," "The Scent Shop," etc.

Peggy Webling's latest book is a long novel of many characters and diverse interests. Winnie Borrow, the quaint, loving little heroine, has a chequered career from humble circumstances to a certain proud position, and, after a period of sorrow and humiliation, reaches at last a safe harbour of refuge. A pleasant heart-moving story which all women will like.

Becky & Co. By MARGARET BAILLIE SAUNDERS

Author of "Lady Q," "Litany Lane," etc.

Becky Damer has an enthusiasm for bygone London, which results in her offering half her house to an order of Franciscan Sisters. The ensuing situation of a young and charming woman managing at the same time a work-room full of girls, a convent of nuns, and three rival lovers next door is full of amusing incident.

This book with its delightful cameos of Kensington, the Minories and the Tower, will appeal to all lovers of London: the contrast between Lady St. Cloud—the embodiment of the spirit of older Kensington—and the saucy work-girls is decidedly piquant. It is a capital story.

Scaramouche By RAFAEL SABATINI

Author of "The Trampling of the Lilies," etc.

Mr. Sabatini has the unusual gift of enlivening with a powerful imagination the great facts of history; he inspires the dry bones with new life and takes us back into the romantic past as few modern writers can do. His latest novel, dealing with the ever-fascinating period of the French Revolution, tells the story of a young aristocrat, who was hailed as the leader of the Revolutionists, and a beautiful girl whom he adored. Their love story, against a vivid background of thrilling events, forms a powerful and picturesque romance.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 8/6 Net

Lady Lilith — By STEPHEN McKENNA

Author of "Sonia," "Sonia Married," etc.

Lady Barbara Neave is a clever, impulsive Society girl who plunges recklessly into one escapade after another with disastrous consequences to her reputation. Her love affairs are exceptionally exhilarating and original, and she is a constant source of delight to her friends and terror to her family.

Mr. McKenna has a special insight into the character of the modern girl, and he writes with intimate knowledge of the doings of the so-called Smart Set, echoes of which only are usually allowed to appear in print. "Lady Lilith" is a brilliant, realistic book, a worthy successor to the ever-popular "Sonia," and "Sonia Married."

The Golden Apple — By KATHLYN RHODES

Author of "The Lure of the Desert," "The Desert Dreamers," etc.

A thrilling new story by this famous writer, whose marvellous interpretation of the fire and passion of the East has made her one of the most widely read of all living authors.

The intrigues of the beautiful Lady Lucia Holland, the struggles of Victor Romney, co-respondent in her husband's divorce suit, to escape her toils, the delicious love-story of pretty Valerie Rivers, and the machinations of the vile Count Paolo Rossi, all combine to make a novel of striking power and originality.

Over half a million copies of Kathlyn Rhodes' novels have already been sold.

Queen Lucia — By E. F. BENSON

Author of "Dodo," "Robin Linnet," etc.

This is another of Mr. Benson's characteristic society novels, full of entertaining dialogue, stimulating and amusing throughout. He goes this time into a small country town for his setting, and introduces us to some delightfully well-bred and simple people, who are exploited by a cunning Indian Guru, or teacher.

His story is a good-natured satire on the various crazes which from time to time attract the idle rich, and particularly on the type of women to whom they appeal. Queen Lucia, with her enthusiasms and absurdities, is a delightful creation worthy to rank with the immortal Dodo.

The Eye of Zeitoon — By TALBOT MUNDY

Author of "The Ivory Trail," etc.

A particularly thrilling adventure story which tells of a little nation of people living in an impregnable mountain fortress of Zeitoon and of their leader and king, known as the Eye of Zeitoon. In a series of vivid pen-pictures one follows the tragic story of the Armenian people, whose land the Turk has made red with Christian blood, together with the exploits of three modern crusaders, daring, laughing, reckless, Anglo-Saxon lads, and the romance of Maga, a wild gipsy daughter of the dawn, who fights, hates, and loves with the full force of her passionate nature.

A grand story of Romantic Love, hand in hand with Brave Adventure,

Hutchinson's New Novels. 8/6 Net

Out of the Vasty Deep

By MRS. BELLOC LOWNDES

Author of "The Lonely House," etc.

A thrilling story of a man whose wives died under suspicious circumstances and a girl whose psychic faculty was employed with remarkable results. Throughout the whole book there is an eerie influence which is deeply impressive, and the network of mystery and intrigue in which the chief characters are involved makes enthralling reading from beginning to end. It is a clever, ingenious novel which men and women alike will enjoy.

Raw Virginity

By ANTHONY LUDOVICI

Author of "Mansel Fellowes," "Catherine Doyle," etc.

Mr. Ludovici is one of our clever modern young men who look with a very critical eye upon men, manners and morals—particularly the latter. His point of view is original; he sees life from an angle quite his own. The story of a mother and her two girls, each anxious to find a husband, is intensely real, and the tragedy of suppressed passion that hovers over the whole book is one that will find an echo in many a lonely heart. With the unfortunate preponderance of women amongst us, this problem of the unmarried girl is one that cannot be ignored. Mr. Ludovici has tackled it with courage and sincerity, and has written a novel that is bound to be read and discussed.

The Man with Three Names

By HAROLD MacGRATH

Author of "The Man on the Box," etc.

Under one name he captured the book world. Under another he was fighting in a great human cause against the father of the girl he loved. The third was a name that must not be known. Love, honour, and many beautiful things of life would be seared by the disclosure. But his enemy knew that the tale of every man's life has an unwritten chapter, and secretly, unrelentingly, he strove to find it out. How the mystery is solved makes a climax that leaves the reader on the tide of emotion.

This is a magnificent human story that will stir the hearts of all who appreciate a good tale of mystery and love.

Not Known Here

By MRS. WILFRID WARD

Author of "The Light Behind," "Great Possessions," etc.

A boy whose mother had married a second time believes himself to be the son of a German, and therefore bound, on the outbreak of war, to those who revolted every instinct of his nature, until his mother confesses to him that he is in reality an Englishman. The struggle between the boy's anxiety to hide his mother's shame, and at the same time to serve his country, makes a most powerful and moving story which touches at times the very bedrock of human sympathy. It is a book that few will be able to read without real emotion.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 8/6 Net

Cold Blood — By ROBIN RICHARDS

A PARTICULARLY STRIKING AND ORIGINAL FIRST NOVEL

Holt, by whose fiendish ingenuity a ghastly murder is committed by an innocent boy, is one of the most vicious and terrible criminals ever conceived. His bland, cultured methods and the devilish craftiness with which he forces his pathetic little victim to his doom, together with a plot which never loses its grip for one moment, make a book which will stir the imagination of the most *blasé* reader and hold him in thrall until the last page.

This is not an ordinary story of murder and mystery; it is like a film of real life, showing a picture of commonplace, everyday people who are engulfed in a gruesome tragedy and carried along against their will by the force of circumstances they can neither prevent nor understand.

Mr. Richards, who is a son-in-law of Maurice Hewlett, has certainly come to stay. His first novel is one of the most arresting pieces of fiction ever written, and gives him at once a place in the front rank of modern novelists.

The Incredible Honeymoon — By E. NESBIT

Author of "The Red House," "Daphne in Fitzroy Street," etc.

Edward Basingstoke, who took to the country lanes for adventure, fell in with one of the most delightful girls in creation. But there were certain obstacles and difficulties, and to circumvent these the two went through a marriage which was one in name only, but which enabled them to live an Arcadian gipsy life together in company with the dog Charles, a fascinating but obstreperous beast.

This is the old story of love at first sight, yet one that is always new. There is a freshness and charm about it that will allure even the most hardened novel reader. It is a kindly, wholesome book which has only to become known to be greatly in demand.

An Adopted Husband — By FUTABATEI

The First Japanese Novel ever translated into English.

This is a particularly interesting book, not only as a rare example of modern Japanese literature, but also because it gives us for the first time a true picture of everyday Japanese life as seen by one of themselves, and brings us closely into touch with many of their unknown habits and customs.

The story is founded on a strange Japanese custom of adopting a husband for a daughter where there is no son to carry on the family name; and in Tetsuya, the pathetic little man whose life was made a burden to him by his relations, and Sayo-ko, the girl he really loved, we realise that Japan has problems of domestic life very like our own.

As a revelation of the hitherto carefully guarded privacy of Eastern life this book is one of the most striking and original works of the present day.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 8/6 Net

A Mender of Images — By NORMA LORIMER

Author of "A Wife out of Egypt," etc.

A charming story of peasant life in sunny Sicily, where the theft of some sacred relics forms the crux of a mystery which involves not only the natives of the countryside, but also some English and American visitors to the place. Miss Lorimer gives an accurate and entertaining picture of life among a people of whom little has been written by the makers of fiction. This is a picturesque and dramatic story which takes one well away from the beaten tracks of romance.

The Black Knight — By MRS. ALFRED SIDGWICK and CROSBIE GARSTIN

A fine stirring story of love and adventure in which the enterprising Black Knight of the title seeks his fortune in the wilds of Canada and spends a considerable part of it in certain Bohemian quarters of Paris. There is a charming picture of Cornwall, from which it is apparent that Mrs. Sidgwick's hand has lost none of its cunning, and the story ends, as a story should, in happiness for those who deserve it most.

Jan — By M. MORGAN GIBBON

Jan is one of the most delightful heroines who ever inspired a writer, and her experiences in the little Welsh village which was her home, and afterwards at Girton, make an enchanting story full of humour and pathos. This is a first novel of unusual charm and sincerity; it rings with the true spirit of Wales, and gives a vivid picture of country life in its most attractive setting.

Also Ran — By MRS. BAILLIE REYNOLDS

Author of "Thalassa," "The Man who Won," etc.

The little village of Estondale was the scene of two grim tragedies which had been thrust into the background by the war, but which, with the reappearance of the two young men concerned, were kindled again into life.

Of the consequences which followed their return, and the loves, romances, and intrigues of the countryside, Mrs. Baillie Reynolds has written a delightfully human story which holds the reader's interest until the climax is reached in the last page.

A Girl for Sale — By MABEL BARNES-GRUNDY

Author of "Candytuft—I mean Veronica," "An Undressed Heroine," etc.

Whiff Wolfran, a refined and well-bred girl, is thrown out of work on the signing of the Armistice, and, unable to find a congenial job, sends a daring advertisement to a London paper, offering "A Girl for Sale." How Mr. Christopher Quinton, a shy, retiring man, buys her, makes an entertaining story, full of amusing situations, which ends in the complete rout of his Aunt Sophia and the prospect of a happier future for Quinton and Whiff.

Hutchinson's New Novels. 8/6 Net

A Man of the Islands
By H. DE VERE STACPOOLE

Author of "The Blue Lagoon," "Under Blue Skies," etc.

A thrilling story of adventures in the South Seas written with the exhilarating enthusiasm which inspires all the work of Mr. Stacpoole. He draws a wonderful picture of breaking seas on lonely islands, and tropical nights amongst the palms, as a background for the exploits of the intrepid Sigurdson, a rough but fascinating character who, in the words of a companion, is, "not a bad chap, but as hard as nails, fearing neither man nor the devil."

Lucinda
By ANTHONY HOPE

Author of "The Prisoner of Zenda," "Dolly Dialogues," etc.

Lucinda is one of those delightful, wayward girls of which this popular author seems to have an unlimited supply. Her adventures with the irresponsible Italian who wrecked her life, and her relations with the splendidly loyal man who remained her friend throughout, make a story which fascinates by its simple charm, yet grips one in its emotional intensity.

The Islands of Desire
By DIANA PATRICK

Author of "The Wider Way" (4th edition).

Marshall Binns is a mill-owner, a rigid, narrow-minded type of Yorkshireman of strict probity who, faced with ruin, succumbs to a temptation which has disastrous consequences for him and for his family. All his hopes are centred in Rose, his youngest daughter, and later in her two children when, the war having enriched him, he is faced with the problem of what to do with his money.

Miss Diana Patrick knows how to get right into the heart of these stern, difficult men of Yorkshire, and her deep understanding of their temperament was the outstanding feature of "The Wider Way," a first novel which had a magnificent reception. This, her second book, in addition to its clever characterisation, tells a story of love and suffering, of intrigue and mystery which will certainly add to her reputation.

The Heart of a Rose
By LOUISE JORDAN MILN

The Novel of the great film of the same name by Langford Reed.

In crown 8vo, **2s. 6d.** *net.*

Mrs. Miln has written a capital novel on a film which is bound to be one of the most popular productions of the day. The story, a beautiful and tender study of a girl's splendid loyalty and her triumph over a difficult, money-sodden old man, is absorbingly interesting, and is set in varied and convincing scenes which make a delightful background for a fascinating love affair.

THE SUCCESS OF THE SPRING SEASON

Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant

by GILBERT FRANKAU

Author of "One of Them"

8s. 6d. *net.*

This striking romance of love and war is now in its 22nd Thousand.

This remarkable novel gives an altogether surprising reality to the ghastly mirage known as the Great War; and Mr. Frankau handles the problem of married love, indifference, and love's second coming with skilful and delicate psychology.

Three Delightful Gift Books for Children

Rif

By DOROTA FLATAU

Author of "Yellow English," "Bait," etc.

In one large handsome quarto volume, **12s. 6d.** *net. With 4 full-page colour and other illustrations.*

Rif is a charmingly fantastic little person who has many adventures in the Land of Make-Believe, in company with a small boy who adores her. Her story rings with the true spirit of childhood, yet there runs throughout it a whimsical thread of philosophy which will delight those of older years whose hearts are still young. She is an unusual, original little character who will soon find a place among such popular favourites as "Peter Pan," and "Alice in Wonderland."

When the Cock Crows

By BRENDA GIRVIN and MONICA COSENS

In crown 8vo, cloth, with illustrations in colour, **5s.** *net.*

A fascinating story of elves and fairies and magic gowan berries that protect little human babies from the Wee Men. There was, however, a certain small person who was carried off in spite of all precautions, and spent a merry time in the fairy world beloved by children of all ages.

A play founded on the story will be produced by the Repertory Theatre in Liverpool, and it is confidently believed that this delightfully original book will be greatly in demand.

The Schoolgirl Author

By BRENDA GIRVIN

Author of "The Girl Scout," etc.

In crown 8vo, cloth, with coloured frontispiece, **5s.** *net.*

Faith Anthony, the warm-hearted, impulsive little schoolgirl whose adventures form the basis of this story, is just the sort of child that other children will love and understand. Her earnest efforts to improve the family fortunes, her bitter disappointments and her dizzy successes will appeal to everyone who reads about her.

A charming present for girls from ten to sixteen; it breathes the spirit of love and courage so necessary in the development of character.

Hutchinson's Important Books

The General Staff and its Problems

The Secret History of the relations between the High Command and the German Imperial Government as revealed by Official Documents

By GENERAL LUDENDORFF

TRANSLATED BY F. APPLEBY HOLT.

In 2 large handsome volumes (uniform with the same author's "My War Memories"), cloth gilt, **52s. 6d.** *net.*

For the serious student of the War, this is certainly the most important work that has yet appeared. Written by Ludendorff to reinforce the statements in his "Memoirs" by shewing what his views were at the time, it contains many original and contemporary documents which it is certain would never have seen the light at all if Germany had not hopelessly lost the War, and the *abolition of the German General Staff had not been one o, the terms of peace.*

To quote but one example, the verbatim report of the conference between Bethmann-Hollweg, Hindenburg and Ludendorff at Pless, at which the unrestricted submarine campaign was finally decided upon, must surely go down to history as one of the most fateful and interesting documents of all time.

Ludendorff's pronouncements on such questions as industrial improvisation, finance, agriculture, franchise, and Germany's foreign policy are a striking revelation of the extent to which he overruled practically every department of the Government and interfered in every matter affecting the conduct of the War. His book reveals him as the real dictator of Germany and illustrates the extraordinary range of his mind.

Mr. Lloyd George (in his Sheffield Speech) says—

"You should read a very remarkable book which has just been issued from the press—'General Ludendorff's Story of the War.'"

My War Memories

By GENERAL LUDENDORFF

With 46 Sketch Maps in the text and 12 large folding Maps (the work of Ludendorff himself).

IN TWO LARGE HANDSOME VOLUMES (800 pages) 34/- net.

The Times in an advance notice (with a leading article) says: "Alike in the breadth of its scope and on the authority of its author the book is much the most considered work that has yet appeared on the war. General Ludendorff's book is the most important and the most illuminating—at least to English readers."

The Spectator says: "A very able and interesting book. General Ludendorff's survey of the war is highly instructive."

"I find these Memoirs extraordinarily interesting. The full translation, which Messrs. Hutchinson are publishing, must necessarily find a place in every library. It is a most illuminating history of the working of Ludendorff's mind, and the psychological interest cannot be gainsaid."—Colonel Repington in *Land and Water.*

"General Ludendorff's Memoirs stand high above the current literature of the war. . . . An invaluable contribution to the history of the war."—Mr. Spencer Wilkinson in the *Sunday Times.*

Second Large Edition Now Ready

Hutchinson's Important Books

British Secret Service during the Great War
By NICHOLAS EVERITT

In one large volume, cloth gilt, **16s.** *net.*

An exceptionally interesting book written by a member of the Service who describes his experiences and adventures with a wealth of detail and a convincing sincerity which has probably never before been equalled. He does not hesitate to criticise where criticism is due, and his denunciation and exposure of some of our methods, particularly the statistics with regard to the Blockade, will come as an unpleasant surprise to those who are accustomed to believe all they read in the newspapers. Having lived behind the scenes, he writes with an intimate knowledge of what was of necessity hidden from the public in wartime, and his revelations will be eagerly read and widely discussed

The Memoirs of M. Alexander Iswolsky, Formerly Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs and Ambassador to France.

In demy 8vo, cloth gilt, with 8 illustrations, **16s.** *net.*

Alexander Iswolsky, the celebrated Russian Diplomatist, held many important posts abroad in addition to serving as Minister of Foreign Affairs during the critical years between 1906 and 1910, when the Russo-Japanese war focussed the attention of the world in the East. A shrewd and able politician of the old school, his own theories and prejudices were never permitted to obscure his sense of justice, and he gives a particularly impartial account of Russian affairs in such different parts of the world as Munich, Tokio, Copenhagen and Paris. His work is a notable contribution to the history of a past régime which has gone never to return.

The War of the Future
By GENERAL VON BERNHARDI

Author of "Germany and the Next War"

TRANSLATED BY F. APPLEBY HOLT.

In one large volume, cloth gilt, **21s.** *net.*

Bernhardi's great book, "Germany and the Next War," of which twenty-five large editions were sold, revealed him to be a keen soldier with the shrewd outlook of a politician. Most of his hideous prophecies came true in the last war, but some were mercifully spared us, and for the fuller development of these he looks to the future.

His present book, based upon recent experiences of warfare, covers a larger area, and proves that Germany is very much alive to her possibilities, and quite ready to learn from her past mistakes. It is published in England in the hope that it may draw the attention of the public to what is still a living danger, and so help in some measure to prevent that blind complacency which was responsible for so great a disaster as the last war.

Hutchinson's Important Books

Herbert Beerbohm Tree

Some Memories of Him and His Life
Collected by MAX BEERBOHM

In one handsome volume, with photogravure frontispiece and 57 illustrations from original photos and drawings, **21s.** *net.*

Sir Herbert Tree was not only a great and brilliant actor, he was a man of unusual and original temperament who, both on the stage and in private life, impressed the people around him in very different ways. The contributions of which his biography is composed, written as they are by such distinguished authorities as Lady Tree and his daughters, Max Beerbohm, Edmund Gosse, Sir Gilbert Parker, Haddon Chambers, Bernard Shaw, W. L. Courtney and several others, cover practically the whole range of his activities, and together give a picture of his life and his art that could be obtained in no other way. Such a gathering of famous names is seldom to be found in one volume, and gives the book, apart from its intimate and personal nature, an almost unprecedented literary value and distinction.

Illumination and its Development in the Present Day

By SIDNEY FARNSWORTH

In demy 8vo, cloth gilt, with frontispiece in colour and numerous other illustrations. **21s.** *net.*

In this exhaustive work Mr. Farnsworth traces the growth of Illumination from its birth, showing, by means of numerous diagrams and drawings, its gradual development through the centuries from mere writing to the elaborate poster work and commercial lettering of the present day. Although other books have already been written on this fascinating subject, Mr. Farnsworth breaks new ground in many directions; he treats the matter from the modern standpoint in a manner which makes his work invaluable not only to students of the art but also to the rapidly-growing public interested in what has hitherto been a somewhat exclusive craft. The book is profusely illustrated and forms a handsome addition to the library of anyone whose tastes lie in this direction.

Cartoons by Poy

With over 100 *illustrations by the famous "Evening News" cartoonist.*
1s. 6d. *net.* (*3rd large Edition.*)

Few artists have sprung more quickly into fame than Poy, the clever caricaturist whose cartoons have become the joy of all readers of *The Evening News*. He has a particular faculty for hitting off in a few deft strokes of his pen the character of his subjects, and, while he is never unkind, holding them up to pleasant ridicule for the world to see. His book contains over one hundred drawings which in themselves form a humorous history of recent events, and he has written an introduction which puts him into closer touch than has hitherto been possible with a public already eager to welcome everything he gives them. This is likely to be one of the most popular books of its kind in the present era.

Hutchinson's Important Books

Ex-King Constantine and the War

By MAJOR G. H. MELAS

In one large handsome volume, with illustrations from photos on art paper, **12s. 6d.** *net.*

Major Melas was Private Secretary to King Constantine of Greece, and a close personal friend until his democratic principles caused him to join Venezelos and the Republican army. He has written his recollections of the Court, with its German intrigues and ceaseless underground plottings, in the frankest possible spirit of friendly criticism. He spares neither the King himself nor his German wife, and does not hesitate to reveal the most intimate details of their private life.

This is probably the most candid book that has ever been published about a living monarch, and will be a source of equal diversion and illumination to all who like to peep behind the scenes of court life.

A New Book on a New Subject

Behind the Motion-Picture Screen

By AUSTEN C. LESCARBOURA

In royal 8vo, cloth gilt, with over 300 *illustrations, on art paper,* **25s.** *net.*

No subject has at the present time a wider appeal than the Cinema, yet little has so far been done to supply the public demand for information. In preparing this work the author has endeavoured to steer a course midway between the purely technical side of production and the popular articles written for those seeking entertainment rather than instruction. Every important phase of Cinema work has been touched upon, from the planning and writing of the scenario to the projecting of the finished film on the screen, and no effort has been spared to achieve a work which is accurate, up-to-date, unbiassed and absolutely different from anything which has appeared previously.

In an entirely original manner the book has been made up with pictures on every right-hand page, the corresponding text being on the left-hand page, so that the reader can actually visualise on one page the details he is following on the other. This, and other distinctive features, mark a new era in the making of books.

Faenza Rest Camp: A Story of the L. of C.

By LT.-COL. H. S. SCOTT-HARDEN

With 16 *illustrations and coloured wrapper,* **6s.** *net.*

Faenza has particularly happy memories for the thousands of officers and men who passed through the Rest Camp on their way to or from the various centres of war. The delightful old Italian city was a haven of rest for tired, war-weary men, and grew to be one of the most popular spots in Europe. Lieut-Col. Scott-Harden, who commanded the Camp, has written a cheery, enthusiastic account of the life there and the work of his staff, and his book, illustrated with some excellent photographs and sketches, is a permanent record of one of the few bright spots in the late war. It is a book which any soldier who knows Faenza will be glad to have.

Hutchinson's Important Books

The Horse as Comrade and Friend

By EVERARD R. CALTHROP

WITH AN INTRODUCTORY LETTER BY LORD LONSDALE.

In one large handsome volume, with 68 illustrations from photos on art paper, **16s.** *net.*

Mr. Calthrop, who is well known as one of the first authorities on the breeding and care of horses in the United Kingdom, has collected the experiences of many years and produced a book of deep interest to horse-lovers and owners all over the world. He writes easily and well, and his book, besides being a practical manual on breeding, training, and kindred matters, is just the sort of thing it would be pleasant to read after a day's hunting or a long trek in the wilds. "The horse," he says, "is a generous-hearted beast. There is nothing mean about a horse. All horses are fit for heaven, but only a few men." It is this deep-rooted understanding of animals which gives his book a value beyond its technical significance and which will find it a welcome in all parts of the world where the horse is the friend of man. There are 68 illustrations, chiefly from photos taken by himself, some of which are unique in their bearing upon the subject.

A Book about Bees

By HERBERT MACE

In one large handsome volume, with 24 illustrations on art paper, **5s.** *net.*

To all interested in the keeping and culture of bees this is a particularly useful and instructive book, covering, as it does, the whole conditions necessary to their welfare. Mr. Mace gives some most valuable information on questions that have always been open to controversy, and his conclusions, the result of many years' practical experience, will be of the utmost assistance to those who are new to the industry. The book is illustrated by photographs, taken in most instances by the writer, which together with the text compose an attractive and comprehensive volume.

41st Year of Issue.

The Year's Art, 1921

Compiled by A. C. R. CARTER

Crown 8vo, cloth, **8s. 6d.** *net.*

Over 600 pages, with Illustrations.

A concise epitome of all matters relating to the Arts of Painting, Sculpture, Engraving, and Architecture, and to Schools of Design, containing events which have occurred during the year 1920, together with information respecting the events of 1921.

Hutchinson's Important Books

A new and cheap edition of the great society novel

Sonia Married

By STEPHEN McKENNA

Author of "Sonia," "Lady Lilith," etc.

In crown 8vo, printed on good paper, cloth bound, with most attractive picture wrapper in colours, **4s. 6d.** *net.*

Mr. Stephen McKenna is without a rival in his own particular field of writing, and Sonia's adventures in marriage give him ample opportunity for a merciless analysis of the heart of modern woman.

The Australian Victories in France in 1918

By General Sir JOHN MONASH, G.C.M.G., K.C.B.

IN ONE LARGE HANDSOME VOLUME, 24/- NET.

With 9 Folding Maps in colour and 31 Illustrations on art paper.

Succeeding General Birdwood early in 1918, Sir John Monash gives a vivid account of the final months of the war and the anxious hours preceding the German attack on Amiens, the repulse of which brought the enemy advance to a standstill at one of the most critical periods of the whole war.

He writes with the utmost candour and in the true sporting spirit of the Colonies, and his book will be read as eagerly for its real human interest as for its undoubted technical and historical value.

Gardens of Celebrities and Celebrated Gardens in and around London

By JESSIE MACGREGOR

IN ONE LARGE HANDSOME VOLUME, 25/- NET.

With 20 beautiful Coloured Plates and exquisite Pencil Drawings by the Author.

Miss Macgregor, who was a favourite pupil of Sir Frederick Leighton and has been a regular Exhibitor at the Academy, here displays her double talent to very great advantage. Her illustrations speak for themselves, while the text gives a most exhaustive survey of London gardens and their history from the days of the Norman Conquest. Both by those who know and love their London, and by Americans and Overseas Britons, this unique book, with its fascinating accounts of Hogarth House, Walpole House, the Chelsea Physicke Garden, and many other historical backgrounds, will be read with unfailing delight.

The Peace Conference

By Dr. E. J. DILLON

Author of "The Eclipse of Russia."

IN ONE LARGE HANDSOME VOLUME, 21/- net.

Dr. Dillon has been for so many years in the closest touch with the inmost circles of European politics, that his opportunities for collecting material for the work which bears this comprehensive title have been unrivalled. His volume covers all the essential points of the vast Conference, and forms a work which should be a permanent history of the events of these world-shaking months.

It does not seem too much to claim that this work is unique in its source and the variety of reliable information which is gathered from its covers. It should be studied by every thinking reader who wishes to know what really happened at Paris during those fateful months when the peace of the world was being settled—we hope for all time.

OVER TWO MILLION ALREADY SOLD

NEW VOLUMES OF

Hutchinson's Famous 3/6 Net Novels

Each in crown 8vo, printed on good paper, cloth bound with most attractive picture wrapper in colours

THE CITY OF PALMS By KATHLYN RHODES

The scene is laid in Constantinople and a desert oasis in North Africa, known to the Arabs as the City of Palms. Here a young Englishman and his wife settle down, but find their lives entangled with that of a half-breed Turk, whose plots against Sir Denzel Wilkinson—a British diplomat at Constantinople—they had taken a large share in frustrating.

THE DESERT DREAMERS By KATHLYN RHODES

Cradled in a setting of all the mystic glamour of the shrouded East, Miss Rhodes tells the story of Richard Allison's passionate love in the desert for the beautiful Emer and of the sudden tragic close of an idyllic existence.

THE WILL OF ALLAH By KATHLYN RHODES

In this story of a marriage problem and its ultimate solution Miss Rhodes gives us of her best. Incident crowds hard on the heels of incident: romantic situations, exciting intrigues and unexpected *dénouements* hold the reader enthralled from start to finish.

THE WOMAN OF THE HORIZON

By GILBERT FRANKAU

Author of "Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant," etc.

A thrilling romance of a man who, having lost most of his illusions in marriage, journeys round the world in search of whatever adventure there may be left. How he found the love of women wherever he went, and discovered it equally alluring in every clime, makes most enthralling reading for all those who, like Mr. Frankau's hero, seek their happiness in the horizons of the future.

ROBIN LINNET By E. F. BENSON

Author of "Dodo," "Up and Down," etc.

There is no writer who gives us more lovable and human boys than Mr. E. F. Benson. Robin is a delightful creature and the scenes in the undergraduates' rooms at Cambridge are extremely amusing.

3/6 Net Series—Continued

THE ROLL CALL — By ARNOLD BENNETT

An extraordinarily vivid story of love and life in London and Paris. Arnold Bennett dives into the very depths of human nature, and his masterly interpretation of modern problems has made him one of the most successful writers of the day.

By the Author of "Sinister Street"

SYLVIA SCARLETT — By COMPTON MACKENZIE

This great romance of theatrical life was most successful in its more expensive form. Sylvia, whose career is described from her childhood, which she spent as a boy, to the days of her marriage, and afterwards, is a striking and original girl. *In the Press.*

SYLVIA AND MICHAEL — By COMPTON MACKENZIE

A charming idyll in which Sylvia, in search of her soul, explores the whole continent of Europe, and ends up on a very small ship—with Michael. *In the Press.*

VOLUMES ALREADY PUBLISHED

THE HUNDREDTH CHANCE — 211th Thousand — By ETHEL M. DELL

THE BARS OF IRON — 283rd Thousand — By ETHEL M. DELL

THE STORY OF AN AFRICAN FARM — By OLIVE SCHREINER

QUEEN OF THE RUSHES — 214th Thousand — By ALLEN RAINE

THE RELENTLESS DESERT — 42nd Thousand — By KATHLYN RHODES

THE HEART OF A CHILD — 16th Edition — By FRANK DANBY

This is Frank Danby's most popular novel.

ASHES OF VENGEANCE — By H. B. SOMERVILLE

A dashing romance of Old France, with its gallantry, its cruelty, and its flashing swords. The stirring story of vendetta keeps the reader thrilled from the first page to the last, when love rises like a phœnix from "The Ashes of Vengeance."

Hutchinson's 2/- Net Novels

NEW VOLUMES AND NEW EDITIONS FOR AUTUMN, 1920

Each volume bound, and with a most attractive pictorial wrapper

THE BEACH OF DREAMS	By H. de Vere Stacpoole
A MAN AND HIS LESSON	W. B. Maxwell
THE PECULIAR MAJOR	Keble Howard
ALL ROADS LEAD TO CALVARY	Jerome K. Jerome
THE PURPLE JAR	Mrs. Alfred Sidgwick
THE LEVEL TRACK	Curtis Yorke
APRIL FOLLY	Cynthia Stockley
BLUE ALOES	Cynthia Stockley
A SENSE OF HUMOUR	Cosmo Hamilton
CONCERT PITCH	Frank Danby
WHERE YOUR TREASURE IS	Beatrice Harraden
AGGIE CUHOON	R. W. Campbell
LILLA; A PART OF HER LIFE	Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes

Hutchinson's 2/- Novels

Already Published.

WHEN MICHAEL CAME TO TOWN	By Madame Albanesi
THE SUNLIT HILLS	Madame Albanesi
HEARTS AND SWEETHEARTS	Madame Albanesi
POPPIES IN THE CORN	Madame Albanesi
AN ENGLISH FAMILY	Harold Begbie
RICHARD RAYNAL, SOLITARY	Robert Hugh Benson
A MIRROR OF SHALLOT	Robert Hugh Benson
THE QUEEN'S TRAGEDY	Robert Hugh Benson
THE KING'S ACHIEVEMENT	Robert Hugh Benson
THE CONVENTIONALISTS	Robert Hugh Benson
BY WHAT AUTHORITY?	Robert Hugh Benson
THE LIGHT INVISIBLE	Robert Hugh Benson
AN AVERAGE MAN	Robert Hugh Benson
THE NECROMANCERS	Robert Hugh Benson
LORD OF THE WORLD	Robert Hugh Benson
THE SENTIMENTALISTS	Robert Hugh Benson
THE BLOND BEAST	R. A. Bennet
OUR ADVERSARY	M. E. Bradden
THE WOLF	J. E. Buckrose
THE TOLL BAR	J. E. Buckrose
THE GOLDEN SWORD	J. B. Harris-Burland
THE WATCHMAN	J. B. Harris-Burland
THE TEMPLE OF LIES	J. B. Harris-Burland
THE GREED OF CONQUEST	J. B. Harris-Burland
THE LION'S CLAWS	J. B. Harris-Burland
THE WHITE YAWL	J. B. Harris-Burland

Hutchinson's 2/- Novels already published—continued

THE SPY	By J. B. Harris-Burland
THE AVALANCHE	J. B. Harris-Burland
THE BUILDER	J. B. Harris-Burland
GABRIELLE JANTHRY	J. B. Harris-Burland
MY LADY FRIVOL	Rosa N. Carey
DONALD AND HELEN	R. W. Campbell
THE MIXED DIVISIONS	R. W. Campbell
THE STRAYINGS OF SANDY	Dorothea Conyers
TWO IMPOSTORS AND TINKER	Dorothea Conyers
THE ARRIVAL OF ANTONY	Dorothea Conyers
THE EXPERIMENTS OF GANYMEDE BUNN	Dorothea Conyers
AUNT JANE AND UNCLE JAMES	Dorothea Conyers
PRISONERS	Mary Cholmondeley
IN OLD MADRAS	Mrs. B. M. Croker
THE SERPENT'S TOOTH	Mrs. B. M Croker
GIVEN IN MARRIAGE	Mrs. B. M. Croker
BLUE CHINA	Mrs. B. M. Croker
ODDS AND ENDS	Mrs. B. M. Croker
BRIDGET	Mrs. B. M. Croker
TWILIGHT	Frank Danby
CONCERT PITCH	Frank Danby
FROM CLUE TO CAPTURE	Dick Donovan
YELLOW ENGLISH	Dorota Flatau
KATE OF KATE HALL	Ellen Thornycroft Fowler
MARGUERITE'S WONDERFUL YEAR	Mabel Barnes-Grundy
TWO IN A TENT—AND JANE	Mabel Barnes-Grundy
HILARY ON HER OWN	Mabel Barnes-Grundy
PATRICIA PLAYS A PART	Mabel Barnes-Grundy
CANDYTUFT—I MEAN VERONICA	Mabel Barnes-Grundy
THE THIRD MISS WENDERBY	Mabel Barnes-Grundy
AN UNDRESSED HEROINE	Mabel Barnes-Grundy
THE VACILLATIONS OF HAZEL	Mabel Barnes-Grundy
HER MAD MONTH	Mabel Barnes-Grundy
CHIFFON'S MARRIAGE	"Gyp"
WE OF THE NEVER-NEVER	Mrs. AEneas Gunn
LITTLE BLUE PIGEON	A. G. Hales
ADAM'S CLAY	Cosmo Hamilton
THE PRINCESS OF NEW YORK	Cosmo Hamilton
BY ORDER OF THE CZAR	Joseph Hatton
KINGSMEAD	Baroness von Hutten
THE BAG OF SAFFRON	Baroness von Hutten
THE GREEN PATCH	Baroness von Hutten
MAGPIE	Baroness von Hutten
THE LORDSHIP OF LOVE	Baroness von Hutten
MARIA	Baroness von Hutten
THE FILIBUSTERS	C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne
THE LOST CONTINENT	C. J. Cutcliffe Hyne
MADEMOISELLE CELESTE	A. F. Knight

Hutchinson's 2/- Novels already published—continued

"GOOD OLD ANNA"	By Mrs. Belloc-Lowndes
LOVE AND THE CRESCENT	Mrs. A. G. Inchbold
DAMARIS	Lucas Malet
BY RIGHT OF SWORD	A. W. Marchmont
A DASH FOR A THRONE	A. W. Marchmont
THE GREAT INTERRUPTION	W. B. Maxwell
IN COTTON WOOL	W. B. Maxwell
MRS. THOMPSON	W. B. Maxwell
THE RAGGED MESSENGER	W. B. Maxwell
THE DEVIL'S GARDEN	W. B. Maxwell
THE ONE WHO LOOKED ON	F. F. Montresor
THE RISE OF RAYMOND	F. Frankfort Moore
THE WHITE CAUSEWAY	F. Frankfort Moore
THE GREAT WHITE HAND	J. E. Muddock
THE ELUSIVE PIMPERNEL	Baroness Orczy
A BRIDE OF THE PLAINS	Baroness Orczy
PETTICOAT GOVERNMENT	Baroness Orczy
A TRUE WOMAN	Baroness Orczy
MEADOWSWEET	Baroness Orczy
THE LEGION OF HONOUR	Baroness Orczy
WILD YOUTH	Sir Gilbert Parker
THE THREE BROTHERS	Eden Phillpotts
CONFESSIONS OF A LADIES' MAN	William Le Queux
THE UNDER SECRETARY	William Le Queux
THE GAMBLERS	William Le Queux
GARTHOWEN	Allen Raine
A WELSH SINGER	Allen Raine
BY BERWEN BANKS	Allen Raine
TORN SAILS	Allen Raine
THALASSA	Mrs. Baillie Reynolds
THE MAN WHO WON	Mrs. Baillie Reynolds
A QUAKER WOOING	Mrs. Fred Reynolds
THE WAX IMAGE	Kathlyn Rhodes
THE STRAIGHT RACE	Kathlyn Rhodes
THE DESERT DREAMERS	Kathlyn Rhodes
THE WILL OF ALLAH	Kathlyn Rhodes
SWEET LIFE	Kathlyn Rhodes
AFTERWARDS	Kathlyn Rhodes
THE MAKING OF A SOUL	Kathlyn Rhodes
THE LURE OF THE DESERT	Kathlyn Rhodes
SANDS OF GOLD	Kathlyn Rhodes
CALVARY	"Rita"
KITTY THE [redacted]	"Rita"
HALF A TRUTH	"Rita"
PEG THE RAKE	"Rita"
THE BRIDGE OF KISSES	Berta Ruck
THE LAD WITH WINGS	Berta Ruck

Hutchinson's 2/- Novels already published—continued

HIS OFFICIAL FIANCÉE	By Berta Ruck
MISS MILLIONS' MAID	Berta Ruck
THE GIRLS AT HIS BILLET	Berta Ruck
THE COURTSHIP OF ROSAMUND FAYRE	Berta Ruck
ANTHONY WILDING	Rafael Sabatini
THE TRAMPLING OF THE LILIES	Rafael Sabatini
THE SHAME OF MOTLEY	Rafael Sabatini
THE BANNER OF THE BULL	Rafael Sabatini
THE SNARE	Rafael Sabatini
LITANY LANE	Mrs. Baillie Saunders
THE MAYORESS'S WOOING	Mrs. Baillie Saunders
LADY Q	Mrs. Baillie Saund[illegible]
THE INHERITANCE	Una L. Silberrad
THE LYNDWOOD AFFAIR	Una L. Silberrad
KING COAL	Upton Sinclair
THE THREE SISTERS	May Sinclair
THE GREAT AGE	J. C. Snaith
IN BLUE WATERS	H. de Vere Stacpoole
THE PEARL FISHERS	H. de Vere Stacpoole
THE BLUE HORIZON	H. de Vere Stacpoole
THE CHILDREN OF THE SEA	H. de Vere Stacpoole
CORPORAL JACQUES OF THE FOREIGN LEGION	H. de Vere Stacpoole
THE REEF OF STARS	H. de Vere Stacpoole
UNDER BLUE SKIES	H. de Vere Stacpoole
THE BATTLE OF FLOWERS	Mrs. H. de Vere Stacpoole
A KING IN BABYLON	Burton E. Steven[illegible]
LITTLE COMRADE	Burton E. Steven[illegible]
THE COMBINED MAZE	May Sinclair
VIRGINIA OF THE RHODESIANS	Cynthia Stockley
PERSUASIVE PEGGY	Maravene Thomp[illegible]
DAVID AND JONATHAN	E. Temple Thur[illegible]
MAX	Mrs. K. C. Thurst[illegible]
THE WEB OF THE SPIDER	H. B. Marriott [illegible]
BOUNDARY HOUSE	Peggy Webling
THE EYES OF THE BLIND	M. P. Willcocks
CHANGE	M. P. Willcocks
A SPECKLED BIRD	Augusta Evans Wi[illegible]
THE WIFE'S TRIALS	Emma Jane Wer[illegible]
EVELYN'S STORY	Emma Jane Worb[illegible]
JOYCE	Curtis Yorke
SHE WHO MEANT WELL	Curtis Yorke
THE MONOMANIAC	Emile Zola
THE LADIES' PARADISE	Emile Zola

Bound in Paper, with Pictorial Cover, 1/6 *net.*

CONFESSIONS OF A LONDON GIRL	By Elizabeth York Miller